

HOW GOD KNOWS COUNTERFACTUALS

by

Matthew A. Postiff

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Author: Matthew A. Postiff
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Advisers: Mark A. Snoeberger, Robert V. McCabe

Among evangelicals, the question of *what* God knows has been a contentious one in recent times. Answers to this question invariably entail a certain answer to the question of *how* God knows what he knows. Even more difficult, however, is the question of whether God knows counterfactuals and how he does so. This thesis proposed to answer the question “How does God know counterfactuals?” It began by defining the term counterfactual and then it examined three possible answers to the question. A counterfactual is a conditional subjunctive statement which, in the strictest definition, assumes that the antecedent did not or will not come to pass.

The thesis described that the middle knowledge explanation as to how God knows counterfactuals presumes libertarian freedom and relies on a third type of knowledge between God’s natural and free knowledge to explain how he knows the free choices of creatures. Besides problems with these two foundational points, the thesis showed that middle knowledge has a number of other problems that make it infeasible as an answer to the question of how God knows counterfactuals.

The Calvinistic variation of middle knowledge fared a little better since it eliminates the libertarian freedom of stock middle knowledge. However, it suffers problems similar to the MK view, particularly the grounding objection and the question of the stability and internal consistency of the view. The recent defection of Terrance Tiessen from the Calvinistic middle knowledge camp shows that these concerns were well founded.

A fully Calvinist, compatibilist, and two-knowledge view of God’s knowledge of counterfactuals was then explained. Besides dealing with some of the shortcomings of the other two views, the thesis offered an important contribution in terms of clarifying that there are multiple types of counterfactuals. The sense in which the term is used is a key in determining how God knows the particular type of counterfactual. God knows the “possibility-type” of counterfactuals in his natural knowledge, but these do not have any inherent truth until after his decree. God knows counterfactuals strictly-defined after his decree in his free knowledge because it is the decree that gives certain antecedents and consequents truth. True counterfactuals are those whose antecedents will not come to pass, but whose consequents would have, had the antecedents come to pass. Though there is debate whether counterfactuals can be true if they do not match reality, this thesis defended their truth on the basis that God knows his decree and how he would have changed it had he decreed other antecedents to come to pass. In effect, God’s decree encompassed all that comes to pass, and all that he would have done in other, relevant circumstances. The truth of counterfactuals is grounded precisely there in God’s decree. This view was then examined as to its implications for a few areas of theology and practical concern.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	Compatibilist Counterfactual
CF-FK	Counterfactuals in God's Free Knowledge
CF-HK	Counterfactuals in Human Knowledge
CF-NK	Counterfactuals in God's Natural Knowledge
CMK	Calvinist Middle Knowledge
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FK	Free Knowledge
<i>FP</i>	<i>Faith and Philosophy</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>MK</i>	Middle Knowledge
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible (1995)</i>
NK	Natural Knowledge
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version (1989)</i>
SDMK	Soft-Determinist Middle Knowledge
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There is a wide disparity of belief today within evangelicalism concerning the extent of God’s knowledge of the world. Some believe God knows all things exhaustively while others say that the future is *open*, that is, that God does not know some things about the future, particularly the free choices of his creatures.¹ This thesis presupposes the former view, namely that *what* God knows about the world includes everything. This includes knowledge of the past, present, future, and all true contingents.

A related question is *how* God knows all of this information. Concerning the way things actually are (or were or will be), this question is also energetically debated. Some evangelicals maintain that God “just knows” all things by virtue of simple, intuitive foreknowledge.² Others consider God’s decree to be an essential logical prerequisite to his knowledge.³ A kind of hybrid that falls between these views advances the notion that God simply knows the free choices of creatures in every possible circumstance, in

¹ On the exhaustive view, see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), p. 312. For the open view, refer to James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, introduction to *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 10; and later in the same volume Gregory A. Boyd, “The Open-Theism View,” p. 24. Boyd writes there, “The Lord can never be caught off guard—for he anticipates all possibilities—he is nevertheless occasionally surprised at the improbable behavior of people.”

² The simple foreknowledge view is advanced by David Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 67. He is sympathetic to the “time telescope” view of how God achieves this knowledge, but his “‘official’ position on the mechanism of divine foreknowledge will be agnostic.”

³ See Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, p. 308: “Aquinas says that God has this knowledge [of vision] because God willed to create the world as it is.”

advance of creating those creatures, and that he uses that knowledge to decide how to create the world; then he knows everything by virtue of his decision. This view is called *middle knowledge* (hereafter abbreviated MK) and it is hybrid in the sense that God's knowledge of the way things are is partly intuitive (with respect to free choices of creatures), and partly based on his decree.⁴

Even more challenging is the related question of how God knows outcomes that “could” or “would” be different if slightly different circumstances prevailed. Such hypotheticals are called *counterfactuals*,⁵ and how God knows them is the subject of the present thesis. There are several explanations offered by evangelicals as to how God knows counterfactuals. God may simply and intuitively just know counterfactuals (this is the simple foreknowledge view extended to answer how God knows counterfactuals). He may know them as part of his natural knowledge of himself and all possibilities logically before his decree.⁶ Or, he may know them logically after his decree as part of his free knowledge.⁷ The MK view also has an explanation for this question. MK is based on two major tenets: first, this type of God's knowledge comes logically before God's decree (it is *pre-volitional*); and second, this knowledge assumes libertarian human freedom. Such knowledge has to do with God's perfect understanding of free creatures and how they would decide to react in any possible circumstance. It is by this knowledge that God knows all counterfactuals. Further, it is by this knowledge that he decides what world he

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It? The Current Controversy over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 12.

⁵ The definition of a *counterfactual* will be more fully developed later in this chapter.

⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), p. 503.

⁷ This view is suggested by John D. Laing, “The Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge,” *JETS* 47 (September 2004): 467.

would like to create. But the two supporting tenets make the view untenable for many Bible believers. So some theologians answer the “how” question about counterfactuals with a modified version of MK which can be labeled *Calvinistic middle knowledge* (hereafter abbreviated CMK). It rejects the libertarian assumption but retains the pre-volitional assumption.

The goal of this thesis is to untangle these options and give a biblically and theologically coherent explanation of *how* God knows counterfactuals.⁸ This explanation will place God’s knowledge of counterfactuals in his free knowledge, but will explain how in one sense, God knows counterfactuals in his natural knowledge. By so doing it can avoid the problematic assumptions of the MK view. The thesis will focus on the MK and CMK views as the opposing alternatives. This is not only because of the current popularity of MK, but also because the “intuitive” alternative seems to stop short of offering any explanation of “how” God knows what he knows, or in fact how things become the way they are in order for God to know them.⁹

What Is a Counterfactual?

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to give a careful definition of the term *counterfactual*. A counterfactual in general is a subjunctive hypothetical statement of the form [CF] “If X were the case, then Y would happen.”¹⁰ There are variants of this general

⁸ The reader will note that it has not been demonstrated that counterfactuals are objects of knowledge, or that they can be true. A brief defense that counterfactuals are legitimate objects of God’s knowledge will be offered in chapter 4, with supporting material sprinkled throughout the remainder of the thesis.

⁹ Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, p. 67.

¹⁰ See *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*, s.v. “counterfactual,” p. 519. It defines counterfactual as “a logical conditional whose antecedent is or is presumed to be contrary to fact.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following definition for a counterfactual: “Pertaining to, or

form, but the general form will be the focus of this thesis.¹¹

A *counterfactual of creaturely freedom* is a more specific type of counterfactual where X and Y are given in more detail. It has the form [CCF] “If person S were in state of affairs C, S would freely do (choose) A.” In this definition, C specifies the total set of circumstances of person S, including all circumstances prior to the free choice. The type of freedom envisioned in the definition is usually of the libertarian sort, but it could also be thought of in a compatibilistic sense.¹²

We can conceive of many possible states of affairs X and actions Y. In the actual world God created, only some of those X’s and Y’s actually occur; these are the “facts.” All the X’s and Y’s which did not occur would be “counter” facts. A counterfactual is therefore any statement of the form [CF] whose condition X did not or will not prevail. Craig explains it this way: “Counterfactual statements are, by definition, contrary to fact, that is, about circumstances and actions which never in fact exist but only *would* exist if things were to be different.”¹³ The truth of such statements “requires only that such

expressing, what has not in fact happened, but might, could, or would, in different conditions; *counterfactual conditional*, a conditional statement of this sort, normally indicating its character by the use of the subjunctive mood in its protasis” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “counterfactual,” [Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1989], 3:1026).

¹¹ For instance, there is the *would-counterfactual* which has the form “If you were to offer me one million dollars, I would take it.” There is the *might-counterfactual* of the form “If you were to offer me one million dollars, I might take it.” Further specification to the “if” part would make clear how the situation would have to change in order to change the *might* to a *would*. For instance, if I had 20 billion dollars already, or too many strings were attached to the deal, one million might not be worth it. There is also the *backtracking-counterfactual* which has the form “If I were to pray for my son, he would not have been killed in the wreck.” See the glossary in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, pp. 207–14.

¹² Pure middle knowledge advocates take the libertarian view, although they do not always surface a clear definition of the type of freedom they support: for instance, Eef Dekker, *Middle Knowledge* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), p. 4. Calvinist middle knowledge advocates take the compatibilist view: for instance, Terrance Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer: How Does God Work in the World?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 289.

¹³ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and*

actions *would* be taken if the specified circumstances *were* to exist.”¹⁴ So, though many statements have the form [CF], it is only those statements where “if X were the case” is not true that are called counterfactuals.

Hypothetically, all [CF] type statements were equally plausible the logical moment before God’s decree and so all equally “counterfactual.” But once God’s decree was settled the next logical moment, some of the counterfactuals became factual and others became true counterfactuals while others became false counterfactuals.

At a given point in time, two or more statements with the form [CF] may seem equally likely, so that from the human perspective they both seem to be equally “counterfactual.” For instance:

[1] if David stays in Keilah, Saul will capture him

[2] if David leaves Keilah, Saul will capture him

[3] if David stays in Keilah, Saul will not capture him

[4] if David leaves Keilah, Saul will not capture him

All are of the counterfactual form, but from what we learn in 1 Samuel 23:7–13, not all were true, and only one of them came to pass. But *a priori*, they all look like counterfactuals *to us*. However, *God* knew ahead of time that statements [2] and [3] are totally false. This is because for [2] David did leave Keilah and Saul did not capture him, but for [3] God indicates that if David stayed in Keilah, Saul would have captured him. In [2], the protasis actually occurred, but the apodosis did not. In [3], the protasis did not come to pass (it was counter the facts) but if David had in fact stayed, God indicates that

Human Freedom (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 140.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the apodosis would have been false because Saul *would* have captured him. So these are not counterfactuals that God knew as true. After all was said and done, [4] turned out to be the “fact” and [1] the true counterfactual. For [4], both protasis and apodosis came to pass; for [1] the protasis did not come to pass, but had it, God says clearly that the apodosis would have.

We must take care then to be aware of which perspective we are using when we speak of counterfactuals—we may consider some things as “counterfactuals” which are not in fact true counterfactuals, but only have the form [CF]. In this thesis, the more restricted definition, from God’s perspective, after his decree, will be used in most instances. This distinction will turn out to be an important foundation for understanding how God knows counterfactuals.

Given this definition of a counterfactual, it should be evident that God “knows” facts in a different sense than he knows counterfactuals. His knowledge of a counterfactual includes that the conditional specifies circumstances that do not come to pass, but that the consequent would have been decreed had the antecedent been part of his decree.

Relevance and Need of the Present Study

The notion that God does know counterfactuals seems undisputable from several key biblical texts. These texts include Matthew 2:13, 11:20–24 (parallel in Luke 10:13–15), 1 Samuel 23:7–13, Acts 21:10–14, 1 Corinthians 2:8, Exodus 13:17, Jeremiah 26:3, and Jeremiah 38:17–23. The way the Bible presents these counterfactuals, and many others, it is hard to deny that God knows them as true propositions in spite of the fact that they do not come to pass. Other counterfactuals we might conjure up are false and God

knows they are false, in which case we say that he does not *know* them. So God knows at least certain counterfactuals, and, it seems reasonable to assume, many more.

The question addressed in this thesis is “how does he do it?” Such a study is necessary because there are some serious shortcomings in the MK and CMK answers to this question—both in general and particularly with respect to how God knows counterfactuals. Since these views are presently somewhat popular, a careful critique and alternative explanation seems in order.

Achieving the goal of the thesis will be beneficial in several respects. Many Christians use the language of contingency and MK without realizing the full implications of it. A sharper understanding of how God knows counterfactuals will impact one’s view of God’s will and guidance, of the doctrine of election, of the problem of evil, and many other theological matters.

Roadmap

The second and third chapters will address the MK view and its Calvinistic variant, and give a critique of them. The fourth chapter will advance a more consistently biblical view which integrates God’s knowledge of himself and his decree to explain his knowledge of counterfactuals. It will use some of the example texts cited above. The concluding chapter will explain some theological and practical implications of this view and will summarize the work.

CHAPTER II

THE MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE EXPLANATION

The aim of this chapter is to explain the middle knowledge view and to examine the theological viability of MK for how God knows counterfactuals.¹⁵ The idea of MK is highly philosophical and so it is important to lay a proper groundwork for the inquiry into its viability. In order to accomplish this aim, the chapter will first introduce the doctrine of MK. Then, some supporting arguments for MK will be reviewed. Third, some of the varied applications of MK will be outlined. Fourth, arguments against the general idea of MK will be presented, followed by some critique of its explanation as to how God knows counterfactuals.

What Is Middle Knowledge?

The doctrine of middle knowledge was first formulated by a Spanish Jesuit named Luis de Molina (1535–1600).¹⁶ It is his name that is the source for the other common designation for the doctrine, namely Molinism.¹⁷ Many modern theologians have

¹⁵ The word *viability* as a description of something indicates that it is capable of success or longevity, that it is practicable. The primary measure of viability in theology is whether the doctrine agrees with the Scriptures. It is also helpful to examine whether the doctrine is consistent within itself (whether it agrees with Scripture or not) and whether it can be modified in order to be made viable if it is not.

¹⁶ Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). This book is a translation of part IV of Molina's *Concordia*, first published in 1588.

¹⁷ Turretin briefly notes that other Jesuits laid claim to the doctrine, namely Fonseca and Lessius. Molina obviously came to the fore as its inventor as history has attached his name to the doctrine. On this, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:213.

embraced the doctrine of MK because of its practical utility in explaining the relationship between various doctrines of Scripture. Proponents today include William Lane Craig,¹⁸ Eef Dekker,¹⁹ Thomas P. Flint,²⁰ John David Laing,²¹ and Alvin Plantinga.²²

Logical Order of Three Types of God's Knowledge

Before describing the doctrine of MK, it is necessary to lay some groundwork. The doctrine assumes that God's knowledge can be divided into three logical parts, that is, a succession of three components in which the second part is logically conditioned upon the first, and the third upon the second. The three parts are organized logically according to priority, but this organization is not temporal, as God's knowledge is not subject to a division according to time.

The first type of divine knowledge is called *natural* or *necessary knowledge*. It is this knowledge that is inherent in God, and by which he knows all necessary things. These things include knowledge of himself, of right and wrong, of logic, etc. It also includes knowledge of all possible states of affairs. This knowledge is essential to God, before any decision of the divine will.

¹⁸ Several of Craig's writings will be referenced throughout this work. For the reader who needs an introduction to middle knowledge, see the popular-level work by Craig, *Only Wise God*, pp. 127–52. This explains Molina's thoughts on a manageable level. A somewhat more technical article appears in William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), pp. 141–64. More technical yet are William Lane Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp. 169–206, and *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp. 237–78.

¹⁹ Dekker, *Middle Knowledge*.

²⁰ Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

²¹ John David Laing, "Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000).

²² Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Plantinga apparently rediscovered the doctrine of Molinism without knowing of Molina's previous work on the subject.

The second type of divine knowledge will be addressed in the next section. Suffice it to say for now that it is called *middle knowledge* (*scientia media*) in that it stands between the first and third types.

The third logical type of divine knowledge is called *free knowledge*. This knowledge comes after God's decision to create the particular world in which we find ourselves. By this point in the logical ordering of God's knowledge, and because of God's decision, all the possible states of affairs have been reduced to the set of affairs that actually prevail in the current world. So God by his free knowledge knows all things as they actually are and will be.²³ How this can be true in the MK view will be taken up in the next section.

Definition of Middle Knowledge

Molina defines the second type of divine knowledge, *middle knowledge*, as that knowledge standing between God's natural and free knowledge:

Finally, the third type is *middle* knowledge, by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.²⁴

In other words, God knows what every free agent *would* do in every combination of circumstances in which that agent might find himself. The various choices that the

²³ This fact distinguishes middle knowledge from open theism. Advocates of middle knowledge do not believe in an open future, where some decisions of free creatures are unknown to God ahead of time. Instead, logically after God's decision and the subsequent free knowledge that comes out of that decision, there is no more openness to the future.

²⁴ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 168. In other literature, this is often cited this way: Molina, *Concordia*, 4.52.9. This specifies the major part of the Concordia (4), the disputation number (52), and the section of the disputation (9). I will specify quotes from Molina using the page numbers from Freddoso's translation.

agent faces may not be equally advantageous or palatable, but according to Molina, the agent could select any way he desired—and the way he desired is part of the contents of God’s MK. God knows therefore the virtually infinite number of propositions of the form “if person S were in state of affairs C, then S would freely do action A.” Another way of putting this is that God knows *counterfactuals of creaturely freedom*.

This type of knowledge is distinct from natural and free knowledge in terms of its logical “timing” and source. It is different than free knowledge in that it comes *before* any decree. It is different than natural knowledge in that it is sourced, in some sense, outside of God. It is related to the free decisions of the creature. As such, this MK is not within God’s control, but is dependent on how the free creature would decide in the various circumstances. By saying this, advocates of MK do not suggest this knowledge is really outside of God, but rather that God knows the creatures by knowing himself and the possible essences of creatures.²⁵ Molina’s definition makes this clear by using the phrase “in His own essence.”

MK is also different than either natural or free knowledge in terms of its content. It is different than natural knowledge in that it comprehends all the possible situations in which creatures may find themselves and the decisions that they *would* make in those circumstances. Natural knowledge does include possibilities, but MK further limits these possibilities to those which are in harmony with the free wills of creatures. It is different than free knowledge in that it includes all possible sets of circumstances and the outcomes of them, whereas free knowledge includes the one set of circumstances that

²⁵ Laing, “Molinism and Supercomprehension,” pp. 290 and 353. Thus is the phrase “outside of himself” qualified. See also Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 178.

God has decreed for the actual world. By the “time” God’s free knowledge has been “settled,” there are no more open possibilities, but God knows all circumstances and all the decisions that free creatures will make in them.

The first part of Molina’s definition says, “in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice.” In the literature this is called the doctrine of *supercomprehension*, that is, that God knows each creature so well that he knows what free choice the creature would make in any possible circumstance.²⁶ This does not mean, according to Molina, that the decision of the creature is or becomes fixed in some fatalistic way. God simply knows what the creature will do because his intellect so infinitely surpasses that of the creature. There are not any conditions that determine or limit the creature’s free choice; he is free to choose whatever way he wants, yet God knows what way he will choose.

The next part of the definition mentions the creaturely faculty of free choice and the innate freedom of the creature. This is an important part of the definition. Molina came to the task of reconciling divine sovereignty and human freedom with the presupposition that men are free in the libertarian sense of that word. This presupposition originates in his commitment to the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly that adherence to the doctrine of man’s freedom is required by the Council of Trent.²⁷ The doctrine of MK “builds in” this freedom as part of God’s knowledge so that the two can be reconciled easily with one another.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 289–319 describes this doctrine of supercomprehension.

²⁷ Council of Trent, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1978), p. 43. Canon 5 says, “If anyone says that after the sin of Adam man’s free will was lost or destroyed, or that it is a thing only in name, indeed a name without a reality, a fiction introduced into the Church by Satan, let him be anathema.” See also Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 169.

The definition also mentions the infinite number of possible situations that God can comprehend. This is no problem for God, as he is omniscient.

Finally, the definition says that God knows the decision of each creaturely free will, “even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to do the opposite.” This undercuts the potential argument against MK that it only offers a hypothetical freedom that is never actual. That is, if God foreknows something, it seems necessary for it to come to pass.²⁸ Notwithstanding, Molina says, the creature is free to do whatever it wants, and God’s prior knowledge of that decision does not affect his true freedom as God saw it in his MK. We will have more to say on this later after we survey the arguments in favor of MK and some of its applications in the study of theology.

Arguments for Middle Knowledge

There are two main lines of support for the doctrine of MK, the Biblical and the philosophical. These will be examined in turn.

Biblical Support for Middle Knowledge

A number of Bible passages are used in support of MK. The classic passage claimed by supporters of MK is 1 Samuel 23:7–13.²⁹

1 Samuel 23:7–13: ⁷When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, “God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars.” ⁸So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. ⁹Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.” ¹⁰Then David

²⁸ Craig makes a helpful distinction here in *Only Wise God*, p. 73. He points out that something being *necessary* is not precisely the same as it being *certain*. If something is *necessary*, it would seem to indicate a sort of fatalism which implies that the choices of free creatures are constrained and somehow not genuine. However, if something is *certain*, this allows that the something will certainly occur, but it does not constrain the creature’s ability to choose another path.

²⁹ All Scripture citations are taken from the NASB, 1995 update, unless otherwise noted.

said, “O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. ¹¹Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.” And the LORD said, “He will come down.” ¹²Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” And the LORD said, “They will surrender you.” ¹³Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

David asked the Lord to tell him the truth or falsity of the following twofold counterfactual, with the condition implied but not explicitly stated: “If I stay in Keilah, will Saul come down, and will the residents of Keilah hand me over?” God replied that this counterfactual was indeed true on both counts. There were two options for David because of the two possible actions of the men of Keilah. If these men were placed in the threatening situation where Saul surrounded their city, they would freely hand over David. However, this situation does not in fact come to pass because David used God’s answer to remove himself from the region and thus not put the men of Keilah into those circumstances. David acted to avoid the bad outcome by nullifying the truth of the subjunctive in the protasis.

Similar dangerous situations occur in Matthew 2:13 and Acts 21:10–14. In Matthew, Joseph is told to flee from Bethlehem with Mary and Jesus. The implied counterfactual is “if you stay in Bethlehem, Herod will kill the child.” In Acts, the eventual fact was “if you go to Jerusalem, you will be captured by the Jews.” A counterfactual that corresponds to this situation would be “if you stay away from Jerusalem, you will avoid capture.”

Matthew 2:13: Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.”

Acts 21:10–14: ¹⁰As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

Another very well known counterfactual passage is Matthew 11:20–24.

Matthew 11:20–24, parallel Luke 10:13–15: ²⁰Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. ²¹"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. ²⁴Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you."

The counterfactual is a past counterfactual. "If the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon... then they would have repented of their sin."³⁰ Evidently, Jesus knows this hypothetical to be true, or he would not have said it as if it were true. Obviously they were not placed in such a situation since Jesus was incarnated far later in history; but the Bible gives us the plain impression that had circumstances been different, their response also would have been different.

Other counterfactual statements occur throughout Scripture. For instance:

1 Corinthians 2:8: [The wisdom of God] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

³⁰ Middle knowledge supporters would add that the people in Tyre and Sidon would have *freely* repented of their sin. It will become clear later in this chapter why this phrasing is problematic, and chapter 4 will consider in more detail how such repentance would have worked.

Exodus 13:17: Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, “The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.”

In the first case, a past counterfactual is used. The counterfactual is “if the princes of this world had been placed into a situation where they were able to come to an understanding of God’s wisdom, then they would have chosen to not crucify Christ.” The second example in Exodus uses a future counterfactual: “If they see war, then they will change their minds.” Exodus 13:17 shows that God knows if the Israelites experience war too soon, they would return to Egypt.

Another example is found in Jeremiah 38, where Jeremiah urges Zedekiah to surrender to the king of Babylon. The counterfactual is of the form “If you surrender, you will survive.” It is a counterfactual because the initial condition never prevails; Zedekiah chooses not to surrender.

Jeremiah 38:17–23: ¹⁷Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive. ¹⁸But if you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand.’” ¹⁹Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for they may give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.” ²⁰But Jeremiah said, “They will not give you over. Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live. ²¹But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word which the LORD has shown me: ²²‘Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say, “Your close friends Have misled and overpowered you; While your feet were sunk in the mire, They turned back.” ²³‘They will also bring out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand, but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned with fire.’”

Another implied but true counterfactual in this passage has to do with the king of Babylon. If the king is placed in circumstances in which Zedekiah surrenders, he would spare Zedekiah and the city. However, in actuality, the king was placed in other

circumstances, wherein Zedekiah refused to surrender, so the king of Babylon destroyed the city and seized Zedekiah.

All of these examples support the idea that God knows the *woulds* of situations that never did in fact come to pass.³¹

Philosophical Support for Middle Knowledge

The primary philosophical argument for MK can be called the *pragmatic* argument, namely, that it explains a number of theological problems so well that it could not be wrong. Craig offers this argument:

Does God, then, possess middle knowledge? It would be difficult to prove in any direct way that he does, for the biblical passages are not unequivocal. Nevertheless, the doctrine is so fruitful in illuminating divine prescience, providence, and predestination that it can be presumed unless there are insoluble objections to it.³²

He continues by writing, “We have seen that the doctrine of divine middle knowledge, while having some biblical support, ought to be accepted mainly because of its great theological advantages.”³³

A second argument in support of MK could be called the *common presupposition* argument, about which Craig writes:

In fact, it is interesting how often ordinary Christian believers naturally assume that God has middle knowledge. For example, Christians regularly seem to presuppose divine middle knowledge when they pray for God’s guidance. They assume that God

³¹ Bavinck lists other texts that are used to support the notion of MK. Besides those listed above, see Gen 11:6; Exod 3:19, 34:16; Deut 7:3–4; 1 Sam 25:29ff.; 2 Sam 12:8; 1 Kings 11:2; 2 Kings 2:10, 13:19; Ps 81:14–16; Jer 26:2–3; Ezek 2:5–7, 3:4–6; Matt 24:22, 26:53; Luke 22:66–68; John 4:10, 6:15; Acts 22:18; Rom 9:29. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 2:199. Another text is Jer 23:21–22. A relevant text in the apocrypha is Wisdom 4:11, which reads, “They were caught up so that evil might not change their understanding or guile deceive their souls” (NRSV). See also Mark 14:21 and Matt 11:14.

³² Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 137. The next major section of this chapter, *Applications of Middle Knowledge*, grows out of this assertion.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

knows which of two paths would be better for them to take.... Or again, Christians have sometimes espoused middle knowledge when they reflect on the issue of the salvation of infants.... The assumption, then, that God possesses such knowledge underlies, I think, the views of many ordinary Christians.³⁴

In other words, MK must be true because it is almost universally accepted, even if many Christians do not consciously understand the implications of what they are saying.

A third philosophical argument is that God's infinite knowledge is so perfect that he must have MK of the free acts of his creatures. His perfections are "unlimited in every aspect."³⁵

Fourth, Craig asserts that

providence and predestination presuppose middle knowledge. According to the doctrine of God's providence, God preordained and arranged all things to suit His purposes. But how could this be done for contingent causes apart from middle knowledge of what they would do under certain circumstances?³⁶

The obvious answer to his rhetorical question is that God *must* have MK to explain these other doctrines (at least from his perspective).³⁷

Applications of Middle Knowledge

One of the alleged advantages of MK is that it can explain many other difficult doctrines. It is so effective in this way that some of Molina's opponents complained that he was destroying biblical mysteries by his clever explanations. In the following subsections, we will examine how MK applies to some difficult theological problems to

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 137–8.

³⁵ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 183.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ There is a seeming circularity among these arguments. Among the theological advantages mentioned earlier is the fact that middle knowledge offers a handy explanation of providence and predestination. Middle knowledge is supposed to explain these doctrines, but here Craig says that middle knowledge is presupposed by these doctrines. Perhaps the circularity can be eliminated by saying that each doctrine entails the others as part of a coherent system.

show why it is so attractive.

Middle Knowledge and the Imputation of Adam's Sin

The Bible teaches that all men were constituted as sinners when the one man Adam sinned (Rom 5:12–21). But the particular ground of this imputation has been debated. While some understand the imputation to be grounded in Adam's federal headship of the human race, others find this idea unfair in that it lays guilt on people who did not personally commit the first sin.

MK provides one possible solution to this alleged unfairness. Shedd explains it this way: "The doctrine of middle knowledge has been employed to explain the imputation of Adam's first sin to his posterity. This sin is imputed because God foreknew that each one of the posterity *would* have committed it if he had been placed in Adam's circumstances."³⁸ In other words, each person would have freely chosen to commit the same sin that Adam did if placed in the same circumstances. This use of MK is an extension beyond its normal use, wherein God simply uses MK to decide what world to instantiate. In this case, MK of a non-existent world is used to produce a real effect in our world.

Middle Knowledge and the Salvation of Infants and the Unevangelized

Another intensely-debated theological problem is the status of those who have not heard or are not able to understand the gospel message. Craig mentions a friend who "proposed that God judges persons who die in infancy on the basis of what they *would* have done if they *had* grown up. Those who would have had faith will be saved, but those

³⁸ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), p. 287, emphasis supplied. See also p. 436.

who would not have believed will be lost.”³⁹

Regarding the status of unevangelized adults, Craig notes the approach of Campus Crusade for Christ which stated in a Great Britain flyer that God bases his judgment on the decision a person *would* have made if had that person heard the gospel in circumstances other than the ones that actually prevailed.⁴⁰ This view, then, denies the need for a personal appropriation of the benefits of salvation through a conscious faith-commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Craig supports this notion, since he believes that some individuals could be saved by their response to general revelation, and others who did not respond positively and did not have access to information about Jesus cannot complain. This is so because both sufficient grace was supplied and there was no world in which they would have freely accepted Christ anyway. God knew this by his MK and knew that it did not matter that they did not have all the information required. But those who would receive Christ were given the opportunity.⁴¹

³⁹ Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 138.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Craig writes, “In conclusion, then, I think that a middle knowledge perspective on the problem of the exclusivity of the Christian religion can be quite fruitful. Since all persons are in sin, all are in need of salvation. Since Christ is God’s unique expiatory sacrifice for sin, salvation is only through Christ. Since Jesus and his work are historical in character, many persons as a result of historical and geographical accident will not be sufficiently well-informed concerning him and thus unable to respond to him in faith. Such persons who are not sufficiently well-informed about Christ’s person and work will be judged on the basis of their response to general revelation and the light that they do have. Perhaps some will be saved through such a response; but on the basis of Scripture we must say that such ‘anonymous Christians’ are relatively rare. Those who are judged and condemned on the basis of their failure to respond to the light of general revelation cannot legitimately complain of unfairness for their not also receiving the light of special revelation, since such persons would not have responded to special revelation had they received it. For God in His providence has so arranged the world that anyone who would receive Christ has the opportunity to do so. Since God loves all persons and desires the salvation of all, He supplies sufficient grace for salvation to every individual, and nobody who would receive Christ if he were to hear the gospel will be denied that opportunity. As Molina puts it, our salvation is in our own hands.” See William Lane Craig, “‘No Other Name’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ,” *FP* 6 (April 1989): 186. Craig obviously does not believe in the condemnatory nature of general revelation as taught in Rom 1:20.

Middle Knowledge and Guidance

In appealing to the seemingly universal use of MK among Christians, Craig mentions that believers often pray for God's guidance by asking him which of two paths, if followed, *would* lead to a better outcome. Craig's argument is that if God does not have MK, then he cannot give guidance to the person asking for it, for he would not know the outcomes in alternative circumstances.⁴² Thus God must have MK.

Middle Knowledge and Prescience, Providence, Predestination

MK is also used to explain the doctrines of God's foreknowledge, sovereign control over the world, and predestination of individuals to salvation. The doctrine of God's foreknowledge is simply explained by Molinists in that God chose by his will one of the possible worlds presented to him by his MK. Once this possible world was selected, God knew all the details about it—including the future. He knew what decision every free creature would make. Thus his prescience is based on the MK and the divine will.

Molinism also maintains a place for God to guide the events of the world. It does so by using the MK and God's will (as above) along with what is called general concurrence. God's will includes his response to the various activities of his creatures. Some of his responses include directly bringing about certain (good) things. At other times, he simply permits (evil) things to occur. But to ensure that things happen the way they must according to his plan, he applies his general concurrence. This "is *not* an influence of God's *on the cause* so that the cause might act after having been previously moved and applied to its act by that influence, but is instead an influence *along with the*

⁴² Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 137.

cause directly on the effect...God concurs by acting to produce the effect.”⁴³ In this way, God’s providence over the world is maintained.

MK also supplies a basis for explaining predestination. It is at this point that two streams of Molinist thought become visible. Molina believed that God decided to give prevenient grace to every person, and on the basis of MK he knew which people would respond in each possible world to that grace. This prevenient grace is a *particular* concurrence, in which God “acts *on* the will, not *with* it, to render it capable of responding freely to God’s initiative.”⁴⁴ God then decreed the particular world that he wanted, and on that basis has predestined those particular people to salvation. Ultimately, predestination for Molina was based on how the creature would freely respond with the help of prevenient grace. Another Jesuit named Francisco Suarez (1548–1617) proposed what has come to be called Congruism, where God first decides to predestine certain individuals to salvation, and then using MK, can see what graces would elicit a free but saving response from each individual. These graces are called “congruent” graces, and thus these graces are effective for the individual. The graces might be different for each individual, but God still supplies grace sufficient for all to be saved (so that they have no excuse for rejecting God).⁴⁵ The basic difference between the two streams of Molinist thought has to do with how MK is used to delimit the elect from the non-elect. However, the main point for purposes of this paper is simply that MK, when coupled with the divine will and particular concurrence, can be used to supply an explanation for predestination that maintains creaturely freedom.

⁴³ Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” p. 154.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 157. Note the difference between general and particular concurrence.

⁴⁵ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, pp. 227–29.

It is interesting to note at this point that Arminius subscribed to the view of MK.⁴⁶

He writes,

That kind of God's knowledge which is called "practical," "of simple intelligence," and "natural or necessary," is the cause of all things through the mode of prescribing and directing, to which is added the action of the will and power; (Psalm civ, 24;) although that "middle" kind of knowledge must intervene in things which depend on the liberty of a created will.⁴⁷

For Arminius, it was God's MK, not his foreknowledge, which formed the basis of predestination.

Middle Knowledge and Biblical Inspiration

Craig also integrates the concept of MK with the doctrine of Biblical inspiration.

He writes,

The traditional doctrine of the plenary, verbal, confluent inspiration of Scripture is a coherent doctrine, given divine middle knowledge. Because God knew the relevant counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, He was able to decree a world containing just those circumstances and persons such that the authors of Scripture would freely compose their respective writings, which God intended to be His gracious Word to us. In the providence of God, the Bible is thus both the Word of God and the word of man.⁴⁸

This formulation of the doctrine of inspiration gives a significant place to the human element in the authorship of Scripture, but it is not clear whether there is a miraculous work of God at the moment of the writing of the Scripture, as indicated in

⁴⁶ See Laing, "Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," p. 457, fn 6. Dekker concludes, "Arminius not only mentions the theory of middle knowledge, but he also has incorporated it in his theology. It appears in all crucial formulations of his doctrine of divine knowledge." See Eef Dekker, "Was Arminius a Molinist?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (Summer 1996): 337–52.

⁴⁷ James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and W. R. Bagnall, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 1:449.

⁴⁸ William Lane Craig, "'Men Moved By The Holy Spirit Spoke From God' (2 Peter 1.21): A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Biblical Inspiration," *Philosophia Christi* NS 1 (1999), par. 115, accessed 15 April 2006, available from <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/menmoved.html>. Internet.

2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21.

Middle Knowledge and Perseverance

Yet another area of theology that is touched by MK is the area of the perseverance of the saints. Craig again writes,

In the moment logically prior to creation, God via His middle knowledge knew who would freely receive Christ as Savior and what sorts of warnings against apostasy would be extrinsically efficacious in keeping them from falling away. Therefore, He decreed to create only those persons to be saved who He knew would freely respond to His warnings and thus persevere, and He simultaneously decreed to provide such warnings. On this account the believer will certainly persevere and yet he does so freely, taking seriously the warnings God has given him.⁴⁹

So the doctrine of perseverance is intertwined with that of inspiration, so that God knew what warnings to place in the Scriptures, and the world he decided to create was the one in which all true believers would heed such warnings. But the warnings themselves are not a means of perseverance as they might be for a Calvinist. Later Craig writes, “Nevertheless, it does seem to me that those who interpret the warnings of Scripture as the means by which God ensures the perseverance of the saints have abandoned the classic understanding of that doctrine and have adopted instead a middle knowledge perspective on perseverance.”⁵⁰ In order to avoid this Calvinistic “unintentional slip” back into MK, something else is necessary:

The classical defender of perseverance must, it seems, if he is to distinguish his view from Molinism, hold to the intrinsic efficacy of God’s grace and, hence, the causal impossibility of the believer’s apostasy. But in that case, the warnings of Scripture against the danger of apostasy seem to become otiose and unreal.⁵¹

⁴⁹ William Lane Craig, “‘Lest Anyone Should Fall’: A Middle Knowledge Perspective on Perseverance and Apostolic Warnings.” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991), par 43, accessed 15 April 2006, available from <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/lest.html>. Internet.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 44.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, par. 42. The word “otiose” indicates that the warnings serve no useful purpose. They are

It is in this way that Craig defends the doctrine of perseverance apart from efficacious grace and thus maintains the Arminian view that true believers can apostatize.

Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil

MK is also used to explain the problem of evil. In short, evil is a necessary “cost” associated with having free creatures. They can freely decide for or against the good. God knows by his MK what each creature will choose and thus how the world will be in light of those choices of evil. This serves to distance God from culpability in the origination of evil in the universe. It is fully the fault of the free creatures that evil entered.

This free-will versus evil tradeoff is the basis of what is called the “Free Will Defense” which is an explanation of how evil can exist at the same time God exists. The atheistic argument against God’s existence goes something like this: if God exists, he is omnipotent, omniscient, and good, but (it is claimed) the existence of suffering is incompatible with the existence of God. And since we know that suffering exists, God therefore must *not* exist. The free will defense of God’s existence rebuts this argument by stating that God can exist at the same time that evil exists because God had good reason, namely the moral freedom of his creatures, for allowing evil.⁵² He values that freedom more highly than the existence of some evil. Plantinga explains the free will defense slightly differently: “The Free Will Defender claims that...God is omnipotent and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.”⁵³

there but really do not do anything.

⁵² There is another explanation for the existence of evil which is called the greater-good theodicy in which God allows evil to exist to bring about greater good than if evil did not exist. This is not really the same as the free-will theodicy, but the free-will theodicy could be explained in those terms, namely that creaturely freedom is the greater good God sought.

⁵³ Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 184. See also Laing, “Molinism and

Otherwise, God is not creating creatures that are significantly free. In other words, the assumption of free creatures forms a limitation on the worlds that are possible to God: once he decides to create a world with good, this entails also that the world contains at least some evil, because God so values creaturely freedom. And since God does not have power over creaturely free decisions, he cannot prevent all evil from happening.

MK provides a tidy explanation of these matters in that it allows for creaturely freedom and therefore it allows for evil without implicating God.

Arguments Against Middle Knowledge

In this section, I will outline several objections to the doctrine of MK.⁵⁴ Such objections arose soon after Molina's publication of the *Concordia* in 1588. By 1594, the debate was so intense that Pope Clement VIII ordered a "Commission on Grace" which

Supercomprehension," pp. 159–63.

⁵⁴ Paul Helm, (*The Providence of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994], pp. 55–61) offers a helpful critique of middle knowledge. Charles Hodge also summarizes a number of objections to the doctrine in *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (reprint of 1952 ed., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 1:398–400. There is also a very technical series of articles in the Christian philosophical journals in which the debate over Molinism is expressed. The articles, in order of their publication, are as follows:

1. Robert M. Adams, "An Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 343–53.
2. William Lane Craig, "Robert Adams's New Anti-Molinist Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (December 1994): 857–61.
3. William Hasker, "Middle Knowledge: A Refutation Revisited," *FP* 12 (April 1995): 223–36. This work is a follow-up to the same author's earlier chapter titled "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge" in William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 39–52.
4. William Hasker, "Explanatory Priority: Transitive and Unequivocal, A Reply to William Craig," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (June 1997): 389–93.
5. William Lane Craig, "On Hasker's Defense of Anti-Molinism," *FP* 15 (April 1998): 236–40.
6. William Hasker, "Anti-Molinism Is Undefeated!" *FP* 17 (January 2000): 126–31.

Articles or chapters mentioned in #1 through #4 are available in a single volume: William Hasker, David Basinger, and Eef Dekker, eds., *Middle Knowledge: Theory and Applications* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

began nearly ten years of study (1597–1606) of Molina’s work.⁵⁵ Somewhat later, Reformed scholar Francis Turretin (1623–87) wrote a section against MK in his *Elenctic Theology*.⁵⁶ Several modern proponents of MK have dealt with these objections and their responses will be included at the appropriate points below.⁵⁷

Inconsistency in the Possible Worlds of Middle Knowledge

One problem with MK as formulated by Molina is that it states God’s natural knowledge is the knowledge of all possibilities, and his MK is his knowledge of what worlds, given creaturely freedom, can be made actual. But, as Frame asks, “What is the difference between these? Are there worlds that are genuinely possible, but which God cannot make actual?”⁵⁸ In other words, if a world cannot be made actual, is it possible in the first place? And if it is not really possible, does MK propose a nearly infinite number of useless facts that God “knows” with respect to that world and millions of other such worlds?⁵⁹

Related to this objection is that MK treats some possibilities differently than others. The decisions of free creatures and the possibilities that those decisions raise are

⁵⁵ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, pp. 169–70, and Alfred J. Freddoso, preface to *On Divine Foreknowledge*, by Luis de Molina, pp. vii–viii. For a detailed timeline of events surrounding this commission, see Laing, “Molinism and Supercomprehension,” pp. 354–58 (Appendix 1).

⁵⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:212–18.

⁵⁷ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, pp. 190–98 deals with six objections to middle knowledge.

⁵⁸ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), p. 503.

⁵⁹ The view I will support in chapter 4 suggests that God knows many counterfactuals, that is, things that do not actually happen. It could be suggested that these constitute “useless” knowledge as well, though I will argue that such knowledge is simply a necessary “problem” for a being which has the perfections God does. My criticism of the MK view focuses on the uselessness of general knowledge or counterfactual knowledge that has to do with impossible worlds.

made a special case compared to other possibilities that God knows as part of his natural knowledge. Why this should be so is unclear, unless it simply grows out of the assumption that creatures are at some level independent of the Creator. Said another way, why is there a distinction between possibilities that are possible for God and possibilities that are only possible for his creatures?

Inconsistency in the Prevolitional Part of Middle Knowledge

There is another problem latent in the definition of MK, which states that God knows what each “faculty of free choice” would do with its freedom. Immediately therefore the definition presupposes that any creatures which do not have a certain type of free choice are not contemplated by God in his design of the universe. That is, God has already decided that only creatures with a libertarian faculty of free choice are among those that he wishes to create. This is an assumption that really needs to be proven. Furthermore, though its proponents claim MK comes before *any* act of the divine will, at least *one* decision has already been willed by God, namely to create only creatures which have a certain type of free will.

It might be objected at this point that God did not have to *will* anything because non-free creatures are simply not possible creatures in God’s natural knowledge. After all, how can non-free creatures be responsible for sinful acts? But it seems far-fetched to say that it would be impossible for God to create creatures with some type of restricted free will. In fact, compatibilists teach this very idea, while not removing responsibility from the creature. There are other creatures with such restrictions (in the animal kingdom). In addition, *we* can certainly think of the possibility of creatures that are free but not in a libertarian sense; why could not God do the same? In sum, it is reasonable to

assume that, if MK were true, then God must have freely chosen to create only human beings with libertarian freedom and thus MK is not fully prevolitional.

Middle Knowledge Proves Too Much from Certain Bible Passages

The basic problem in using the passages cited earlier is that the advocates of MK try to prove too much with these texts. Nowhere in them are the following propositions stated: a) that a libertarian free will is a necessity or in fact exists; b) that God knows counterfactuals in all other possible worlds; and c) that there is only one really feasible (MK) explanation for the texts. In fact, all of those propositions are actually undercut by these texts.

Consider first the proposition that humans have a libertarian free will. The 1 Samuel passage about the men of Keilah certainly does not support this. They are faced with a choice to either give up David to Saul, or face a siege by Saul's army in which they will be destroyed. The choice is obviously very constrained. The men of Keilah do not have a free choice in this situation. Only a remarkably principled leader would not turn over David to Saul in face of the high likelihood of dying otherwise.

The second proposition, that God knows counterfactuals in all other possible worlds, is not supported by the texts either. In fact, the 1 Corinthians 2:8 passage mentions the princes *of this world*, not some other possible world, or all other possible worlds. The way these situations are presented in the Bible relate to this present world and slight variations of it that might be envisioned. In no way do these situations suggest an infinity of other possibilities that God envisioned beforehand—possibilities that according to MK could never have been actualized because they would not have been agreeable to the free will of the creatures in that world.

The third proposition, that there is only one really feasible explanation of these texts, also goes far beyond what the texts actually say. Even though God knows at least some *woulds* (the texts indicate so) it is a stretch to say this proves God has full-blown MK, as Craig admits.⁶⁰ In fact, it is easy to come up with other explanations. For example, God knew the nature or purpose of the men of Keilah so well as they existed at the time David made his request, that he knew how they would respond if faced with such a difficult situation.⁶¹ The point of the “Woe” in Matthew 11:21, 23 is not to teach MK, but rather to show the hardness of heart of present unbelievers as compared with the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom. God knew the character of the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom and the effect that such preaching and miracles by Christ would have had on them had it been available. Whether their repentance would have been true “godly sorrow” or just temporary “worldly sorrow” is not the main issue here because the Lord was not incarnate at the time of the existence of those civilizations and thus the “if part” of the counterfactual never happened. The main point is that their response would have been somehow positive in the hypothetical case, and thus would demonstrate their relative responsiveness compared to the hardened unbelievers in the Lord’s audience.⁶²

In addition, the idea that God used such MK in the logical moment prior to his

⁶⁰ Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 137, fn 1.

⁶¹ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), p. 226.

⁶² From the Calvinist perspective, this explanation leaves some loose ends that will be addressed in chapter 4. Was the repentance genuine, salvific repentance? Or was it merely worldly remorse over sin and its consequences? If it was genuine repentance, it would require some form of help from God to achieve this repentance, because a simple alteration of the circumstances would not be enough to achieve genuine repentance. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the statement of the counterfactual does not fully spell out all the relevant “behind the scenes” information, particularly as to how God will change his behavior in the counterfactual situation. It is an error to ignore this information. From the libertarian perspective, no additional intervention by God would be necessary in either the true or temporary repentance case (we would suppose that God had already given prevenient grace to the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon).

decree is certainly not taught by these texts, for the texts themselves are not trying to teach a thorough formulation of God's omniscience or even a part thereof.

Bible Passages that are Problems for the Middle Knowledge View

Another difficulty with MK is that there are some very plain texts in the Scripture that teach against it. Isaiah 46:11, Romans 9:11, and Ephesians 1:11 all teach a very strong doctrine of God's omnipotence, plan, and purpose. The Romans passage specifically tells us that God's election of Jacob over Esau was according to his own purpose, and not the works or free choices of either of the children. Ephesians 1:11 asserts the same basic truth regarding the election of believers to salvation.

Taking the Ephesians passage as an example, proponents of MK would explain that God does indeed purpose and execute his will so that it comes to pass. He simply plans it through the use of his MK, and brings it to pass either by his general or particular concurrence. They can affirm that God does this by using his knowledge of the actions of free creatures in all possible circumstances and then selecting which set of circumstances to bring about. In reply, note that the Ephesians passage does not offer any room for the idea that God contemplated the free choices of individuals before formulating his purpose or plan. Certainly the Romans 9:11 passage does not allow for free creaturely choice as a basis for God's election.

Argument Against Libertarian Freedom

Yet another argument against MK has to do with its reliance upon libertarian freedom. There are no limitations upon this freedom in Molina's view, so that the

decisions made by the creature seem to be totally arbitrary.⁶³ In support of this notion, Molina asserts that “free decisions of the will exceed the nature of the subject willing them; that is to say, a subject’s nature does not determine which decision the will shall make—otherwise, the decision would not be free and contingent.”⁶⁴ But it is obvious, if from nothing more than experience, that the nature of a person does affect his decisions, so that his decisions are not free in the libertarian sense.

Consider first of all that when we say someone has a libertarian free will, we are not saying that he can do anything he wants. For instance, a physical limitation prevents him from choosing to jump to the moon if that desire is presented to his mind. Similarly, if there is a fork in the road, but one of the directions has a sign that says “Thru Traffic Only,” then there is a constraint on his choice of which direction to travel. In terms of a counterfactual, “If David decides to leave Keilah, he will leave Keilah.” That was in fact what occurred, but it could easily have been the case that the authorities in Keilah prevented him from leaving.

If such physical, external limitations exist, why are not immaterial and spiritual factors also limiters to one’s freedom? In fact, such *are* preventers to free choice. Consider Romans 8:7, “because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.” Or again Romans 3:11, “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God.” The unbelieving but supposedly free agent, if faced with the general choice to please God or

⁶³ Note that Molina is committed to the Catholic doctrine of man’s freedom (Council of Trent, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, p. 43). This view has infiltrated the whole middle knowledge stream of thinking so that other types of freedom are ruled out immediately. But when approaching the problem of sovereignty and free will, the whole question boils down to what kind of freedom is possessed by humans. The Molinist answer to the problem is simply to assume libertarian freedom.

⁶⁴ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 181.

please himself, will ultimately choose to please himself. He cannot subject himself to the law of God. Because of sin, certain options may not present themselves to the agent's mind, or certain options are so inimical to the sin nature that the agent would never choose them without help of God.

In sum, the Bible's view of man as a sinner by nature is a significant reason to reject libertarian free will and the whole MK system that rests on it.⁶⁵

God's Foreknowledge Is Incompatible with Libertarian Freedom

Another notable objection to MK is its relationship to God's knowledge of future events. Simply stated, if God knows that a future action will invariably occur, how can the agent making a choice to do that action be totally free to do so? In other words, *God's foreknowledge limits freedom*.⁶⁶ If the action will occur, the agent is in some sense constrained to make the decision that he does. Thus, the freedom offered by MK seems to be only hypothetical—the agent is somehow free in God's reckoning before the divine decree, but at the point of decision the agent really has no choice in the matter. The creature's freedom is significantly reduced.

As an example of this, Luke 24 tells us that the Lord *had* to suffer before entering his glory (v. 26). The Old Testament Scriptures *had* to be fulfilled (v. 44). It was *necessary* that Christ suffer and rise again the third day (v. 46). Freedom as it relates to the involvement of other people in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ seems to have been severely constrained.

⁶⁵ For an extended argument against libertarian freedom, see Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *FP* 20 (October, 2003): 460–78.

⁶⁶ God's foreknowledge is a *preventer* to an agent's free decision.

Grudem puts the objection this way,

Craig's view does not sustain a view of freedom in the sense Arminians usually maintain: that no cause or set of causes made a person choose the way he or she did. On Craig's view, the surrounding circumstances and the person's own disposition *guarantee* that a certain choice will be made—otherwise, God could not know what the choice would be from his exhaustive knowledge of the person and the circumstances. But if God knows what the choice will be, and if that choice is guaranteed, then it could not be otherwise. Moreover, if both the person and the circumstances have been created by God, then ultimately the outcome has been determined by God. This sounds very close to freedom in a Calvinist sense, but it is certainly not the kind of freedom that most Arminians would accept.⁶⁷

This problem is recognized by Craig when he writes,

Given that God has foreknown an event, His foreknowledge is, in the composed sense, incapable of being otherwise. But considered in itself apart from temporal considerations, it is, in the divided sense, able to be different. Similarly, given that an event is future, it is, in the composed sense, incapable of not occurring. But apart from temporal considerations, it is, in the divided sense, able to not occur. Hence, it is difficult to see why, if a future event is in a certain sense contingent [the divided sense], God's foreknowledge is not in the same sense contingent. But Molina eschewed this conclusion because, as we have seen, he felt it undermined the certainty of God's foreknowledge.⁶⁸

Craig's defense requires some additional explanation. When he says that God's foreknowledge, in the "composed sense," is incapable of being otherwise, he means that the combination of God's knowledge, MK, and decree all taken together do not allow for the possibility of something else happening. That is, once God has decreed this particular world to come into existence, the future is closed. What is to be will be. This composed

⁶⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 349.

⁶⁸ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, pp. 189–90. On p. 190 he writes, "Because God's knowledge thus depends on the creature's will and does not produce its effect without a determination of the divine will, it does not produce its effects necessarily." On p. 199 he continues, "While it is impossible in the composed sense, given God's foreknowledge, for anything to happen differently than it will, this sense is irrelevant to contingency and freedom. In the relevant, divided sense we are as perfectly free in our decisions and actions as if God's foreknowledge did not exist. Middle knowledge therefore supplies not only the basis for divine foreknowledge, but also the means of reconciling that foreknowledge with creaturely freedom and contingency."

sense, however, is irrelevant to the issues of contingency and freedom, Craig asserts.⁶⁹

The relevant sense is the “divided sense,” in which “we are as perfectly free in our decisions and actions as if God’s foreknowledge did not exist.”⁷⁰ In other words, Craig claims that the only way we are allowed to consider human freedom is to look back and consider how God saw it before the decree to instantiate the world. In a logical sense, before the decree of how things would actually be, God did not foreknow anything about it. In the absence of foreknowledge, we can consider creatures to be free and not constrained by God’s foreknowledge. Once this sense is combined with his will to produce the “composed sense,” it is only then that freedom is basically eliminated.

While actual freedom is limited in this composed sense, Craig avoids fatalism by explaining that if a free agent were to choose differently, then God’s MK would have been different.⁷¹ Thus, God’s foreknowledge does not, Craig says, make the action happen invariably because God’s will is based on his MK of the decision of the creature’s will. He therefore avoids saying that foreknowledge of an event necessarily entails the occurrence of the event. Foreknowledge renders the event *certain*, but the event was not *necessary* because the creature could have been disposed to choose differently, thus making God’s middle knowledge different than it was. For the MK advocate, it has to be

⁶⁹ Craig, “Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?” p. 152.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 192 writes, “Therefore, the divine foreknowledge which exists is, indeed, incompatible with the event’s not occurring, but it is perfectly compatible with the event’s being *able* to not occur. For if that possibility were to be actualized, the divine foreknowledge would always have been different.” But on page 198 he writes, “Hence it is within Peter’s power to refrain from sin, but it is not within his power to affect God’s foreknowledge, even though it is necessarily true that where [sic] he to refrain from sin God would always have foreknown differently.” We’ve already shown that according to Molinists, God has no power over his middle knowledge. But if Peter does not have power over it either, then it seems that it is totally outside the realm of anyone’s control!

explained this way to avoid fatalism.

The certainty/necessity distinction seems to help Craig's case somewhat.⁷² But working against Craig's defense is the fact that our whole existence is circumscribed by this "composed sense." We have no access to the divided sense. Only God had access to it in eternity past. So, our own freedom seems to be unavailable to us!

Looking at the problem another way, *true human freedom would limit God's foreknowledge*. Craig almost admits this when he says that God's foreknowledge is in a sense (the divided sense) contingent. Molina did not want to admit such a contingency because it seemed to make God uncertain of the future. And indeed, true non-hypothetical human freedom precludes God's ability to plan and execute the future, for God would not know how the creature would choose until the choice was actually made.⁷³

In addition, advocates of MK portray God's MK as completely certain knowledge. But *complete freedom undermines MK itself*.⁷⁴ Why? Because MK teaches

⁷² The distinction between certainty and necessity may initially seem like a nitpick. However, both Arminians (Craig, as explained above) and Calvinists speak in such terms. On the latter, see Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, pp. 635–39 in his discussion on soft determinism, where he distinguishes three senses of necessity and two kinds of constraint. I believe God can render an event certain without it being fatalistically necessary.

⁷³ Indeed, in the Molinist account, not even the creature knows what he would choose ahead of time, for neither the circumstances nor the nature of the creature are determinate in the choice. Of course, Molinists assert the doctrine of supercomprehension at this point, saying that "God just knows." It is not really clear how he knows such an arbitrary choice, but he knows. Turretin writes, "The middle knowledge can have no certainty because it is occupied about an uncertain and contingent object." On this, see Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:215.

⁷⁴ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), p. 189. See also Helm, *The Providence of God*, p. 61 and Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 778. See also David M. Ciocchi, "Reconciling Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom," *JETS* 37 (September 1994): 406, who argues a different way. If God knows Judas will betray Christ given circumstances C, there is no possible world in which Judas will *not* betray Christ given circumstances C. Thus libertarian free will is incompatible with middle knowledge. Ciocchi suggests that compatibilist free will is the only type of freedom that can work with middle knowledge (but see chapter 3 below for more on that).

that God certainly knows what the creatures would freely do; however *complete* freedom means that no conditions can determine human actions, arbitrary as they are. Therefore God could not be sure of what the creature will decide and thus his MK would also be uncertain. MK advocates can handle this objection by appealing to the notion that God's perfections are so exceptional that he "just knows" by supercomprehension how creatures will choose.

The Grounding Objection

Another argument against MK has to do with the grounds of the truth of the counterfactual propositions allegedly known by God in his MK. That is to say, on what basis are those counterfactuals true? Who or what makes them true? We cannot propose an answer involving the correspondence of the proposition to reality, for by definition a counterfactual has a counter-reality conditional. It is true even though it does not have any reality to which we may peg its truth.

If we suppose that God himself causes the truth of a counterfactual, this raises a problem, for God was not supposed to have any act of will before he knew the counterfactuals to be true. Their truth should be determined by the libertarianly free choice of the creature, lest the libertarian presupposition fail. Furthermore, true counterfactuals are supposed to be true regardless of which path God actually chose. So the truth of them does not seem to be able to be grounded in God.

On the other hand, if we suppose that the creature causes the truth of the counterfactual, this is problematic for at least a couple of reasons. First, grounding the truth of the counterfactual in the creature would seem to require belief in backward causation (the effect comes before the cause) in order to make the creature be the cause of

a before-time effect on God's knowledge. This is a difficult belief to accept. Second, some allegedly true counterfactuals relate to creatures that are not in fact ever created. But if the truth-ground of the counterfactual is in the creature, and the creature is never created, it seems that the counterfactual cannot have a ground for its truth.⁷⁵ In fact, the worlds that were never to be do not seem to provide any basis for "truth" and so could not provide any "knowledge" to God. Turretin states it this way: "Things not true cannot be foreknown as true."⁷⁶

Since both proposals (the ground in God or the ground in the creature) are ridden with problems, the ground of why the counterfactuals are true seems to be missing.⁷⁷

Craig has written much on this very subject to attempt to refute the grounding objection.⁷⁸ His basic argument is that grounding objectors have not been able to formulate a convincing case for the grounding objection, as well as the fact that it seems reasonable that counterfactuals are true from our perspective, even granting that the situations that give rise to the counterfactuals will never obtain. He offers the "liver and onions versus chocolate chip cookies" example in which most people will freely choose the cookies over the liver if offered the choice. It is certainly not far-fetched to think that

⁷⁵ For the general ideas in this section, I am indebted to Flint, *Divine Providence*, pp. 123–25.

⁷⁶ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:214.

⁷⁷ Craig defines the grounding objection thus: "It is the claim that there are no true counterfactuals concerning what creatures would freely do under certain specified circumstances—the propositions expressed by such counterfactual sentences are said either to have no truth value or to be uniformly false—, since there is nothing to make these counterfactuals true. Because they are contrary-to-fact conditionals and are supposed to be true logically prior to God's creative decree, there is no ground of the truth of such counterfactual propositions. Thus, they cannot be known by God." Craig's formulation of the grounding objection goes too far, however. The form of the grounding objection given above does not say that there is *no* truth to counterfactuals or that they are *all* false; it simply says that such truth cannot be convincingly grounded either in God or in man *if* the MK system is assumed. If we drop the libertarian and prevolitional requirements, then sufficient grounds for the truth of counterfactuals may well appear. See William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection'," *FP* 18 (July 2001): 337–38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 337–52, and Craig, *Only Wise God*, pp. 139–45.

this counterfactual has some truth to it! In reply to Craig, it seems the case for the grounding objection is convincing enough that it requires a cogent rejoinder from MK proponents. In the absence of a convincing case in either direction, the grounding objection remains a substantial hurdle to accepting MK as viable.

The Problematic Relation of Middle Knowledge to God's Omnipotence

To consider yet another objection to MK, think for a moment about open theism. In that system of thought, God is said to be omniscient, i.e. he knows everything, but there are certain things that are not objects of knowledge. The classical view of omniscience would say this is a subtraction from God's omniscience. But open view simply claims that those things "subtracted" were never and could never be objects of knowledge in the first place. No being, including God, could know them.⁷⁹

The doctrine of MK is definitely different than the open view. For one, there is no openness in the future according to the MK view.⁸⁰ Further, the decisions of free agents are definitely included in God's MK, based as they are on God's supercomprehension of the finite free will. However, Molinism is similar to open theism in at least one respect: while open theism removes some things from the set of all things God could know, so Molinism removes the decisions of free creatures from the realm of God's power.⁸¹ God

⁷⁹ James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, introduction to *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, p. 10. They write, "The open view holds that the future is partly open to God, for God cannot foreknow the decisions that free agents shall make. God is omniscient...for he perfectly knows all reality. But the reality God perfectly knows is partly composed of possibilities, 'maybes.'"

⁸⁰ Some theologians have misunderstood this key difference between MK and open theism. Bavinck writes, "[God] established an outline of the world plan but leaves the fleshing out of the outline to creatures" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:199). A page earlier, he states that "in all cases, therefore, God is ready." In contrast, MK proponents teach that God uses his MK to formulate his decree, and once that decree is formulated, there is no openness to the future.

⁸¹ Craig writes, "But we have seen that it is not within God's power to determine what decisions

simply knows about those free decisions but can do nothing about that knowledge.

One might think that this limitation on God's power is only temporary, during the early (logical) moments of his deliberations about the creation of the world. That is, God had no power over what his MK tells him, but that in actually making the creative decision to instantiate one of the possible worlds, he regains control over everything and can influence the free will in such a way as to make any decision that God desires, since God can put that agent in whatever circumstances he desires. However, this is not the case. In fact, God has *no* power over the decisions of free creatures. According to Molina and as suggested by Craig in the area of salvation, this works out in that, "There are some possible persons who would not freely receive Christ under any circumstances."⁸² In other words, God could not construct any set of circumstances to bring those possible persons to Christ. This is plainly a denial of God's omnipotence and makes God omnipotent over everything except human beings.⁸³ To this notion, Reymond responds,

If there were one square inch of this entire universe not under his sovereign governance, God is neither absolutely sovereign nor omniscient since that one square inch would have equal claim to its own sovereignty to do as it willed.... This construction [of middle knowledge] cannot be squared with the biblical passages that teach that God did in fact foreordain whatever comes to pass, knows all things infallibly, and providentially governs all his creatures and all their actions to bring

creatures would freely take under various circumstances." See Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 200. A variant of Molinism which says that God does have power over these counterfactuals is defended by Jonathan Kvanvig, "On Behalf of Maverick Molinism," *FP* 19 (July 2002), accessed 17 April 2006, available from <http://www.Missouri.edu/~kvanvig/papers/onbehalfmaverickmolism.htm>, Internet. This view is claimed to be incoherent, however, in Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 65–70, and in idem, "The Multiple Muddles of Maverick Molinism," *FP* 20 (January 2003): 91–101.

⁸² Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 147. He explains, "In other words, some people, no matter how much the Spirit of God worked on their hearts, no matter how favorable their upbringing, no matter how many times or ways they heard the gospel, would still refuse to bow the knee and give their lives to Christ...I believe that it probably is in fact true... Hence, it is possible that God is not, after all, able to create a world in which all persons freely receive Christ."

⁸³ See the fifth objection in Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:215.

about his own holy ends (see, e.g., Acts 2:23; Rom. 9:16; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:13).⁸⁴

God Does Not Have Middle Knowledge of Himself

To illustrate a final problem with the doctrine of MK, consider the counterfactual in Jeremiah 26:3. It specifies the reaction of God conditioned on the response of the people. “If they turn...then I will not bring the calamity.”

Jeremiah 26:3–6: ³‘Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.’ ⁴“And you will say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law, which I have set before you, ⁵to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; ⁶then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.” ’ ’ ”

This is a special kind of counterfactual which suggests that God has knowledge of counterfactuals involving himself. There is a question as to whether God has counterfactual *middle* knowledge *about* himself, but he does at least seem to have counterfactual knowledge that involves himself.

Craig understands Molina to teach that God does know such conditionals about himself, though these are not part of his MK, but rather are part of his free knowledge. This is because MK is knowledge of counterfactuals *before* any decision of the divine will. But such divine self-referential counterfactuals come logically *after* God decides how he will order the affairs of the world in response to his MK of creaturely decisions, so therefore it is not “middle” knowledge.⁸⁵

Many other passages might be used in an attempt to support of MK, but they are of this divinely self-referential type and so tell us nothing about God’s knowledge of

⁸⁴ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 190.

⁸⁵ See Craig, *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 182.

creaturely decisions. Rather, the passages tell us that God knows how he himself would decide in response to some contingency. For instance, in Jeremiah 42, Johanan and company came to Jeremiah to ask if they should stay in the land or go down to Egypt. Jeremiah replied that if they stayed, God would bless them (v. 10). But if they went to Egypt, God would curse them (v. 13, 16). God knew which way the people would choose, but the text portrays the situation in such a way that the alternative was a genuine possibility known by God. The counterfactual *would* of the passage is that if the people stayed, then God would bless them. The actuality that came to pass was “if the people went to Egypt, then God would curse them.” This supports the notion that God knows how he himself would decide to respond, but does not support that he knows how the people will decide.

A problem with the idea of MK arises at this point. It seems that God cannot have MK of his own actions, although he is himself a free being. This difficulty is admitted by advocates of the view, since “Molina believes that if God had MK of His own actions, that is to say, if God knew what He would do under any circumstances prior to the determination of His own will, then God would not be free to will whatever He wished under those circumstances.”⁸⁶ In other words, God has MK of his creatures to preserve the freedom of his creatures, but he does not have MK of himself, for this would eliminate his own freedom. This seemingly contradictory idea arises from the nature of God’s supercomprehension of his creatures, which supercomprehension he cannot have of himself because he simply knows himself and does not have a “higher” knowledge of his will than he himself does. That is, God knows the creaturely will infinitely better than

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 180.

the creature knows himself; but God's knowledge of his own will does not infinitely exceed his own knowledge of himself.

Molina and Craig solve this problem by saying that God does know what he would do in other circumstances, but this knowledge is located in his free knowledge, not in MK (of himself).⁸⁷ God does not have MK of himself.

The objection to this solution is that we as people seem to have some sort of MK of ourselves. We know what we would do in circumstances other than those that obtain, based on our present circumstances and preferences. This does seem to limit our freedom, just as if God had MK of himself, it would limit his freedom. For if we are eventually placed in those circumstances that we previously contemplated, we would have already made up our mind as to what to do and we would not be free to will whatever we wish. The idea of MK seems to break down in this way because God knows some counterfactuals (about free creatures) through MK before his decree, while he knows other counterfactuals (about himself) through free knowledge logically after his decree, yet we ourselves know counterfactuals about ourselves before we make a decision on a particular issue. Does not God know about his own preferences logically before he makes a decision?⁸⁸

How Does God Know Counterfactuals?

One final objection to the doctrine of MK is not so much an objection to the doctrine itself as it is a shortcoming of the doctrine with respect to the question posed in

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

⁸⁸ Travis James Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," in *WTJ* 68 (2006): 15–21 offers five objections to MK, not all of which are mentioned in this chapter.

this thesis. And that shortcoming is this: precisely how does MK explain how God knows the counterfactuals that he knows?

MK does explain the logical order of God's three types of knowledge and it does explain how God uses the middle type to formulate his decree. MK does delve more deeply into the nature of divine knowledge than the innate foreknowledge view.⁸⁹ And the doctrine of supercomprehension explains that God has middle knowledge because he inherently has "complete ideas of possible creatures—ideas which encompass everything about the creatures they represent, including the wills of those creatures."⁹⁰ But as for the question of how he knows the counterfactuals, the answer seems to be that he "just knows" with no further explanation. Molina's definition says "in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice."⁹¹ Given libertarian freedom, in which the creature has the power of contrary choice in any situation, such an answer seems necessary. Since the outcome of the free choice could hypothetically go in any direction, how could God know it apart from such intuition? Suarez took a different tack, namely that since counterfactuals have a truth-value, the omniscient God must know their truth value.⁹² In either case (Molina or Suarez), God's knowledge of counterfactuals amounts to simple intuition—he intuitively just knows the free choices of creatures given any possible set of circumstances. Such a view offers little in the way of a deeper explanation for the "how" question.⁹³ One wonders how the view

⁸⁹ Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 127.

⁹⁰ Laing, *Molinism and Supercomprehension*, p. 353.

⁹¹ Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, p. 168.

⁹² Robert Cook, "God, Middle Knowledge and Alternative Worlds," in *EQ* 62 (October 1990): 295.

⁹³ Hasker points out this unsatisfactory conclusion in his review of *The Only Wise God: The*

is significantly different from the view that places the knowledge of counterfactuals in God's *natural* knowledge since God knows all possibilities there.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction to the doctrine of MK and reviewed some of its supporting arguments and theological applications. It then demonstrated that the doctrine of MK as formulated by Molina has many insurmountable objections. There are nine substantial objections to the doctrine of MK. It also falls short of giving a real substantive explanation to the “how” question posed in this thesis.

Some of these flaws have given rise to a variation of the doctrine of MK which is common among moderate Calvinists. It will be the subject of the next chapter.

Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom, by William Lane Craig, in *FP* 6 (April 1989): 223–26.

CHAPTER III

THE CALVINISTIC MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE EXPLANATION

The previous chapter considered the middle knowledge explanation to our question of how God knows counterfactuals. Not only does MK have a number of serious inherent difficulties, it also does not provide a fully satisfactory answer to our question. Neither God's supercomprehension of the creaturely will (Molina), nor his knowledge of the truth-value of all counterfactual propositions (Suarez) seem possible in the face of true libertarian freedom. And even if either approach were possible, the answer for our question is essentially that God "just knows."

Some Calvinists have proposed an improvement on MK that addresses this very problem. The solution comes in eliminating libertarian freedom in favor of compatibilist freedom. Such freedom is also known as voluntary freedom, freedom of spontaneity, or freedom of inclination. In a compatibilist view, God can know creaturely choices because he knows the creature's will, desires, circumstances, indeed everything that relates to the choice the creature faces because this is how God (at least hypothetically) plans to arrange things. Since God knows all of this, he can know with certainty how the creature will respond in any possible circumstance. God's knowledge of these factors is the alleged solution to the MK grounding objection, and thus Calvinistic MK overcomes the problem for MK caused by libertarian freedom.

The aim of this chapter is to explain the Calvinist version of MK and determine if it ultimately proves helpful in answering the question of how God knows counterfactuals.

Definition of Calvinist Middle Knowledge and Its Proponents

There are several proponents of the CMK view in contemporary literature. They include Bruce Ware, Terrance Tiessen, John Frame, and John Feinberg, though the latter two have not embraced the view like Ware and Tiessen have. Ware says that God utilizes a Calvinist version of middle knowledge which he calls

“compatibilist middle knowledge,” knowledge of what compatibilistically free creatures *would* do, which is middle between God’s knowledge of merely what *could* be and his knowledge of specifically what *will* be. Both Terrance Tiessen and John Frame have, in recent years, urged this concept, even if not with the same terminology.⁹⁴

With this definition, it is clear that CMK shares with MK the logical three-fold division of God’s knowledge. It drops libertarian freedom in favor of compatibilist freedom. Tiessen also defends the Calvinistic version of middle knowledge.⁹⁵ He makes clear that CMK also shares with MK the prevolitional element when he writes,

God’s knowledge of what particular kinds of creatures would do in particular possible circumstances is not dependent on God’s decree.... Thus, we do best to distinguish this as a distinct logical moment in God’s knowing which is still prior to his deciding upon the history of the world.⁹⁶

Ware’s inclusion of Frame is somewhat dubious. Frame agrees that God has knowledge of hypothetical matters, but he rejects the “radical libertarianism” of Molina.⁹⁷ Broadly speaking, Frame writes as a critic of middle knowledge and does not seem to label his view as a “variant” of the middle knowledge view. He simply says God knows

⁹⁴ Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), p. 27.

⁹⁵ Tiessen, *Providence & Prayer*, pp. 289–362, and idem, “Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge, Although They Reject Molinism.” *WTJ* 69 (Fall 2007): 345–66. However, see his later retraction (which I will discuss below) in Paul Helm and Terrance L. Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge? A Conversation.” *WTJ* 71 (Fall 2009): 437–54.

⁹⁶ Tiessen, “Why Calvinists Should Believe in Divine Middle Knowledge,” p. 366.

⁹⁷ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 151.

hypotheticals, and does so as part of his natural or necessary knowledge.⁹⁸ He clearly distances himself from Molina when he writes,

God does take human nature into account when he formulates his eternal plan for us. But that is only one perspective! The other perspective is that God’s knowledge of our nature is itself dependent upon his plan to make us in a particular way. God’s will is based on his knowledge, and his knowledge is based on his will.⁹⁹

Frame does not allow for God’s knowledge to be dependent upon creatures in a sense apart from His will.

Another theologian that might be included in the list of CMK supporters is John Feinberg. In one source, he agrees that God has middle knowledge.¹⁰⁰ But in another he writes,

Moreover, I don’t believe God has middle knowledge, if middle knowledge includes knowledge of what humans would freely do in the libertarian sense. On the other hand, if one holds some form of determinism as I do, there is no reason to deny that God has middle knowledge of what humans would do (compatibilistically) freely.... So, while I doubt that an indeterminist could consistently hold that God has middle knowledge, I see no reason for a determinist to deny this.¹⁰¹

The remainder of this chapter will focus on Ware and Tiessen as the clearest proponents of the CMK view.

Differences Between Calvinistic Middle Knowledge and Stock MK

This variant of middle knowledge is “middle” in that it is between natural and free knowledge, but is it so in the same sense as Molina defined? There are at least two reasons why we should conclude that it is not the same.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 503.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ John S. Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 34.

¹⁰¹ Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, p. 752.

First, CMK specifically rules out libertarian freedom as impossible since God cannot know which way a libertarian free choice might go. Ware writes,

I agree fully with these men and others who argue that Molinist middle knowledge, predicated on libertarian human freedom, is not possible. How can God know what a free agent *would* do in some state of affairs if, all things being just what they are, the agent can do A or not-A? Knowing and controlling the circumstances in which free creatures act only exerts control over the range of possible choices, but in no way does it indicate just what choice would in fact be made. And, as seen earlier, since these libertarianly free choices have no choice-specific reasons for them, neither God nor the agent could know why he chooses specifically and exactly what he does. How, then, is God to know what an agent *would* choose?¹⁰²

This is to say that the CMK teaches that God does know *counterfactuals*, but not counterfactuals of *creaturely freedom*, because creatures are not libertarianly free.

Second, the Calvinistic version of middle knowledge is different from Molinism in that it presumes that given a set of conditions, the agent's behavior can be determined with certainty. Pure Molinism does not allow the conditions to so constrain the agent.¹⁰³ Remember that it is God's supercomprehension of the agent's will, not his understanding of the conditions, that allows God to know how the agent would respond. Ware explains:

But if we really do make our choices for prevailing reasons, if the conditions (both internal and external) surrounding a particular choice present to us the individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for making just the choices we do...if this is so, then it follows that God can know what choices *would be made* by knowing just exactly the set of conditions...that gives rise to particular choices and actions. So, he can envision an agent in one situation, and knowing all the factors true in that situation can know from these factors what choice the agent *would make here*, and he can envision a slightly different situation, and again, in knowing all the factors true in that situation he can know what the agent *would do*, instead, *there*.¹⁰⁴

Based on these differences, it should be evident that the Calvinistic version of middle knowledge is not really middle knowledge as Molina formulated it because it

¹⁰² Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, p. 27.

¹⁰³ See the earlier discussion of certainty versus necessity in footnote 72.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

does not allow for libertarian human freedom. Rather, it emphasizes that God knows counterfactuals within a soft determinist or compatibilist framework. Frame makes this point when he writes, “If we abandon libertarianism, we abandon the traditional meaning of middle knowledge, and then, as I said earlier, there is no reason to distinguish God’s knowledge of contingencies from his necessary knowledge of himself.”¹⁰⁵

The Infeasibility of Calvinistic Middle Knowledge

CMK retains the important prevolitional element of MK even while it discards libertarian freedom. But can Calvinists really salvage such a middle knowledge for themselves? The case is made by a number of theologians that they cannot.¹⁰⁶

Compatibilist Freedom Makes a Third Type of Knowledge Infeasible

The first objection to CMK has to do with how compatibilist freedom disallows a third, “middle” type of knowledge. CMK proponents paint the picture that God knows the infinite number of possible circumstances in which an agent might find himself. In each set of circumstances, the agent has choices about the course of action to take. These are what the agent *could* do and are part of God’s innate, natural knowledge, which includes the knowledge of all possibilities. Further, God knows by his middle knowledge which of those choices the agent will actually choose. This final choice is what the agent *would* do. So if agent A is in circumstances C, he could choose option 1, option 2, or

¹⁰⁵ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁶ Several authors are dogmatic that CMK is not viable. First, see Laing, “Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge.” Second, Helm in Helm and Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge?” Third, David Werther, “Calvinism and Middle Knowledge” *Ars Disputandi* 3 (2003), accessed 9 February 2010, available from <http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000122/article.pdf>, Internet. Finally, see Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

option 3. God knows this much by his natural knowledge. But God also allegedly knows, by his middle knowledge, that agent A being in circumstances C will mean that in the end, A chooses option 2. It is this knowledge that God uses in constructing his decree.

Helm points out that CMK relies heavily on this “could vs. would” distinction.¹⁰⁷ But the distinction is meaningless if compatibilist freedom is part of CMK. It is—and so CMK has a severe internal inconsistency. The inconsistency is just this: if God knows the possible circumstances in which the agent finds himself, then he should know perfectly the exact choice the agent will make in that circumstance. He should not have to “figure out” which choice of the multiple choices the agent might make. The very definition of compatibilist freedom includes that God completely knows the circumstances (external and internal, including inmost desires and all) that affect the creature’s decision. Once these factors are “fixed” then the final choice is known. In other words, if God knows agent A and circumstances C, then he knows everything that is necessary to know that A will choose option 2. There are no such options as 1 and 3. The number of options in the “could” set is reduced to only a single option because of compatibilistic freedom. Thus, the *coulds equal the woulds* in every possible scenario, and there seems to be no difference between CMK and God’s knowledge of all possibilities.¹⁰⁸

This effectively denies any place for “possibilities.” There may be such a thing as a “possibility” from our perspective, but from God’s perspective, it seems reasonable to deny there is such a thing as pure possibility. Otherwise, God would be a hostage to

¹⁰⁷ Helm and Tiessen, “Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge?,” p. 441.

¹⁰⁸ Werther, “Calvinism and Middle Knowledge,” takes a different tack in his case against CMK. His basic argument is that the fatalistic sort of necessity of Calvinism weighs against any kind of contingent knowledge in God, and thus God’s knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom must be entirely natural or entirely free. But his argument seems to be an attack on Calvinism more so than on CMK itself. Therefore, I am not devoting significant space to it here.

fortune.¹⁰⁹ Pure chance, whether it supposedly arises from randomness, the creature's freedom, or God's ignorance cannot viably co-exist with a high view of God's sovereignty. It does not seem right to say that something just "could" or "would" happen. Nothing "could" or "would" happen unless it was "willed" by God.

Among those who are critics of CMK, there is some debate as to where God's knowledge of counterfactuals should be placed, whether in his natural knowledge or his free knowledge. But the critics agree that the middle knowledge of CMK reduces to either of the other two types of knowledge and is not a third, "middle" category. Laing proposes that counterfactual knowledge should be placed in God's free knowledge:

Thus, although we may be sympathetic to the theological concerns of those who attempt to combine middle knowledge with moderate Calvinism, we must reject it as an ultimately untenable position. The soft determinist may claim that God possesses knowledge of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom, but she cannot claim that such knowledge is prevolitional; it must be part of God's free knowledge.¹¹⁰

Frame attempts to place the knowledge of counterfactuals in God's natural or necessary knowledge.¹¹¹ He suggests that such knowledge of the creature *is* prevolitional,

¹⁰⁹ Dabney concurs: "Has this distinction of contingent effects any place at all, in God's mind? Is it not a distinction relevant only to our ignorance? An effect is, in some cases, to us contingent; because our partial blindness prevents our foreseeing precisely what are the present concurring causes, promoting, or preventing, or whether the things supposed to be, are real causes, under the given circumstances.... There is, therefore, to God, no such thing, in strictness of speech, as a contingent effect.... To God, therefore, whose knowledge is perfect, there is literally no such thing as a contingent effect." See Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 158.

¹¹⁰ Laing, "Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," p. 467. This agrees with his earlier dissertation, in which he writes, "Tiessen characterizes his own position as a middle knowledge Calvinist position. It is doubtful that any such position exists, for by definition, the content of middle knowledge must be prevolitional; that is, it must be true [sic] independent of God's will." See Laing, "Molinism and Supercomprehension: Grounding Counterfactual Truth," p. 347. Laing believes in libertarian freedom and denies the validity of the grounding objection. He bases this on the notion that free creatures exist in the mind of God as ideas, and God supercomprehends their wills.

¹¹¹ Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 503. What I am saying here is an inference from what he has written. What pointed me in this direction was Frame's statement about God's knowledge of possibilities: "God knows what creatures and what creaturely actions are possible, simply because he knows himself. He knows what he can bring about. God knows these possibilities simply by knowing his own nature. And his knowledge of his own nature is necessary." This is the opposite of what Laing said, that the knowledge of

because it is a part of God’s knowledge of all possibilities. But it should be noted that creatures are not a part of God’s necessary knowledge, for creatures themselves are not necessary. God could or could not have created them. In any case, Frame agrees that middle knowledge is not a third separate type of knowledge.

The Grounding Objection Makes CMK Infeasible

A second challenge to CMK is that it does not properly deal with the grounding objection. The grounding objection states that there is no way to ground the truth of counterfactuals in MK, and thus they must be false and cannot be known by God, since God only knows true things. We have shown from the Scriptures that God does know at least some counterfactuals, so a general statement of the grounding objection is not bulletproof.¹¹² When examining the claims of CMK, we can ask upon what, in that system, is the truth of such counterfactuals grounded. Such a line of questioning will serve to bring to light another serious inconsistency of Calvinist middle knowledge.¹¹³

Suppose we have a proposition of the form “if agent A were in circumstances C, he would compatibilistically freely choose to do X.” It would seem that the truth of this is

possibilities must be a component of God’s *free knowledge* because it is post-volitional. Frame argues the other way—that God knows simply because he knows as part of his nature. I conclude therefore that Frame does not ground counterfactuals in the creature or in God’s will, but in God himself, in his nature and natural knowledge.

¹¹² If Scripture asserts that God knows the counterfactuals, then they must be true, regardless of anyone’s appeal to a grounding objection. This may seem to be contradictory to my earlier acceptance of the grounding objection as having validity as an argument against middle knowledge. To resolve the apparent contradiction, note that the grounding objection applies specifically to Molinism because of its claim that counterfactual truths exist before any action of the divine will. But if we accept that an action of the divine will precedes the counterfactuals, then it is easy to ground them: their ground is in God’s will. Without that, it seems counterfactual truths must be grounded in the creature which does not yet exist.

¹¹³ The inconsistency is pointed out by Laing, “Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge,” pp. 462–63. He says that most compatibilists do accept the grounding objection, yet when they embrace a compatibilist version of middle knowledge, they do not realize that the grounding objection applies equally well to their version of middle knowledge.

grounded in God's will, because A, C, and X are all contemplated as existing, which would require God's willing them to exist. Furthermore, the very notion that A has some level of freedom to choose X in circumstances C assumes that God has willed the agent to have such freedom, i.e. that he has already willed agent A to have a certain kind of freedom. But if the truth of the counterfactual is grounded in God's will, or in God's will of how the creature would be, then this type of middle knowledge is not prevolitional, that is, before any decree of God. But the prevolitional idea is a key pillar to middle knowledge—if it is removed, the knowledge is not in the middle of anything. If there is no pre-volitional middle knowledge, such knowledge is actually posterior to the divine will to create and is thus part of God's free knowledge. This is basically just compatibilism.

On the other hand, if the truth of the example proposition is not grounded in God's will, then it must be grounded in the creature somehow.¹¹⁴ Besides the obviously problematic nature of grounding any truth outside of God, this view is basically the same view as propounded by Arminian middle knowledge advocates. That is to say, if the truth of the counterfactual is generally grounded in the creature, it seems that it would have to be specifically grounded in the creature's own decision-making capacity. This is what the Calvinist was trying to avoid in the first place! Laing ties together the loose ends in this way:

The proponent of a Calvinist-Middle Knowledge position seems to be caught between the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, if she claims that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom is grounded in the will of God or in the way

¹¹⁴ Laing, "Compatibility of Calvinism and Middle Knowledge," p. 467, admits the possibility that one could say the truth of counterfactuals need not be grounded at all, but that would not solve the compatibilist's problem that no matter where he grounds counterfactual truth, he is not left with either his Calvinism or a knowledge that is in the middle of anything.

God created the creaturely will, then she has denied the prevolitional character of divine knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom and therefore, her position is not in the middle of anything. On the other hand, if she claims that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilist freedom are grounded in the character of the creature as he pre-exists in the mind of God, or that the truth of counterfactuals of compatibilistic freedom do not need to be grounded, then her view of freedom is virtually indistinguishable from libertarian freedom.¹¹⁵

CMK Relinquishes Its Calvinist Distinctive

A third and final argument against CMK is that in adopting middle knowledge, the Calvinism of CMK loses many of its distinctive elements in favor of Arminianism. The whole idea of middle knowledge was to explain God's knowledge of libertarian free will. Arminius adopted the view of MK to explain God's knowledge of creaturely liberty. MK grounds God's decree, in some sense, in the creature rather than in the creator, another very non-Calvinistic idea. CMK is far from a "middle ground." It leans heavily toward the Arminian side of the spectrum while still claiming to be Calvinistic.¹¹⁶

In the end, the point of all of these objections is to say that if a Calvinist wants to hold to something he calls middle knowledge, he must significantly change the definition of it to remove libertarian freedom and all of the problems associated therewith, and he must take care to avoid the pitfalls of improper grounding of counterfactual truth, lest he fall back into pure Molinism. Furthermore, he must admit that the middle knowledge is only middle in the sense that it has to do with counterfactuals, not in the sense that it stands between two other types of God's knowledge. Then the question is, why call it

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ I am indebted to Travis Campbell for this argument. He writes, "But consistent Calvinists cannot embrace the *scientia media* either, if for no other reason than that too many Reformed distinctives would be lost in this scheme." See Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," p. 14. For a similar objection, see David Basinger, "The New Calvinism: A Sheep in Wolves' Clothing," *SJT* 39 (1986): 483–99.

middle knowledge at all? And finally, if it logically moves toward Arminianism, it is questionable if it can really be called *Calvinistic* either.

How Does God Know Counterfactuals?

If we overlook for a moment the problems just mentioned, the strength of the CMK proposal is that it does a better job of explaining how God knows counterfactuals than does the stock MK view. As we saw at the end of the previous chapter, MK explains God's knowledge of counterfactuals by saying that he "just knows." CMK is different, because it does not have to contend with libertarian freedom and the inherent uncertainty about the choices such free agents would make. As a result, CMK can propose to ground God's knowledge of counterfactuals in his knowledge of compatibilistically free creatures in terms of their circumstances, desires, character, etc. It does not have to appeal to "supercomprehension." In other words, God knows counterfactuals because he knows the creatures and circumstances, and thus all of the factors that are necessary to know how the creature will decide.

Recent Abandonment of the Calvinistic Middle Knowledge View

The problems mentioned above, among others, have brought the CMK view to a breaking point. In a recently published interchange between Helm and Tiessen, Helm presents his case against Tiessen's CMK and Tiessen admits that he no longer holds to CMK.¹¹⁷

Helm points out one of the objections we raised above, namely that, on a compatibilist view of freedom, there is no difference between the "coulds" of natural

¹¹⁷ Helm and Tiessen, "Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle Knowledge?" *WTJ* 71 (Fall 2009): 437–54.

knowledge and the “woulds” of middle knowledge.¹¹⁸ His second objection is that Tiessen seems to consider the circumstances of an agent in two segments—first, circumstances unaffected by God, and second, circumstances altered by some divine intervention. The need for such a distinction is unclear and is not explained by Tiessen.¹¹⁹ Third, Tiessen uses clearly temporal language when speaking of God’s analysis and deliberation of things before his decree. This jeopardizes God’s omniscience by making God “learn” through a discursive process.¹²⁰ And so, Helm concludes, the proposed benefits of CMK to the question of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are at best illusory.¹²¹

Tiessen concedes Helm’s “could = would” argument:

Reflection on Professor Helm’s recent comments has finally brought me to the conclusion that he is correct on this point. God’s knowledge of counterfactuals is not different from his knowledge of possibilities; it is therefore part of his necessary knowledge.¹²²

Tiessen says that he probably was in error because he likened God’s knowledge too closely to human knowledge, and he was enamored with the usefulness of counterfactual knowledge to God’s wise planning of the decree. He realizes now that

The sole rationale for positing middle knowledge is to give room for libertarian creaturely freedom.... I now believe that rejection of the Molinist construction because of its faulty understanding of freedom also entails rejection of the concept of divine middle knowledge.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 441–443.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 443.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 444. I do not believe that temporalism is necessary to Tiessen’s case for counterfactual knowledge *per se*.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 447.

¹²² Ibid., p. 448.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 450.

Tiessen is willing to rename his proposal to “hypothetical knowledge Calvinism” or something similar, but he still sees great utility to counterfactual knowledge in the formulation of the decree, he is not willing to abandon his temporal view of God, nor does he feel the need to modify his model of providence simply because of the change of name and movement of counterfactual knowledge “back” to the natural knowledge category.¹²⁴

Such a formerly staunch proponent of the mediating view of CMK thus has admitted that the case for CMK is very weak. To satisfy the Calvinist, a more consistent view is needed, one that does not rely on Molinism.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that several Calvinist theologians have proposed an alternative definition of middle knowledge that is based on compatibilist freedom. This definition departs fundamentally from the idea of middle knowledge as proposed by Molina and others. The Calvinistic variation is similar in that it suggests that God knows what *would* happen in circumstances other than those that prevail. But this knowledge does not share the libertarian character of pure Molinism. This is the major strength of the Calvinist Molinist view. So, it can propose that God knows counterfactuals on the basis of his knowing the character and conditions that lead to the creature’s choices.

As promising as CMK sounds initially, this chapter pointed out some serious problems with CMK. First, because of its commitment to compatibilistic freedom, it cannot explain the difference between what a creature *could* do and what it *would* do. In any given set of circumstances, with the nature of the creature also given, it appears that

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 450, 452, 453.

there is only one *could* that the creature could do, and that is precisely the same as what it *would* do. This leaves no room for a third type of knowledge in God, and the contents of God's "middle" knowledge fit either into his natural knowledge or his free knowledge. Second, CMK claims that counterfactual knowledge in God is prevolitional, but it cannot handle the grounding objection effectively without moving either in the direction of Arminian Molinism or a compatibilist account of freedom. Third, CMK would have to give up its Calvinist distinctive to be true to MK. CMK is not, therefore, really middle knowledge after all. And though it is somewhat more insightful as to our question of how God knows counterfactuals, its internal inconsistencies have even led such a strong advocate as Tiessen to abandon it just within the last year.

CMK seems unstable enough that it should be questioned how long it might survive. But even if it does, it does not offer a satisfactory explanation of God's knowledge of counterfactuals. The next chapter will offer a view that is more consistent with the relevant biblical texts.

CHAPTER IV

THE COMPATIBILIST COUNTERFACTUAL EXPLANATION

The previous two chapters demonstrated some serious shortcomings in the middle knowledge and Calvinistic middle knowledge explanations of how God knows counterfactuals. Major difficulties with the MK and CMK views include:

- A pre-volitional, third type of knowledge;
- Libertarian free will (MK only);
- Grounding objection;
- Lack of substantive explanation of *how* God knows counterfactuals (mainly the MK view).

The aim of this chapter is to explain an alternate view that addresses the major problems of the two popular competing views and shows just how God knows counterfactuals. I have elected to call this view the compatibilist counterfactual explanation (hereafter abbreviated CC) in order to distinguish it from the earlier views, to assert that God does indeed know counterfactuals, to make clear the kind of human freedom that it entails, and to show the basis on which God can know counterfactuals. The CC explanation also emphasizes God's decree as an essential element to his knowledge of counterfactuals. I have not found a better name in the literature, and this seems more descriptive than the "Augustinian-Calvinist" name for the similar view

recently explained by Paul Helm.¹²⁵

The approach of this chapter is to divide the case for the CC explanation into component assertions that are explained in turn.

God Has Two Types of Knowledge

There is an eternal distinction between the creator and the creation. God is not his creation. Neither the creation nor any particular creatures will ever be deified. The creator exists necessarily and independently, but the creature exists dependently. This creator-creature distinction lends credibility to the notion that there are logically two kinds of knowledge in God. First, God knows himself and all things compatible with himself (his natural knowledge or *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*); and second, God knows everything that is outside of himself (his free knowledge or *scientia visionis*). Said in another way, God knows his own nature and he knows his decree with respect to everything that exists (or did or will exist) outside of himself.

By firmly maintaining this two-fold distinction, the CC explanation eliminates the pre-volitional, third type of knowledge which was the source of difficulty for both the MK and CMK views. It also avoids the problem of MK in which it seems that God's knowledge is dependent, at least in some sense, on creatures. God is truly independent from creation and does not look to it for his knowledge.

God Knows Nothing as a Raw Possibility

God does not know raw possibilities, by which I mean events that might or might

¹²⁵ See Helm, "The Augustinian-Calvinist View," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, p. 161–89. Note though that Helm is describing his view of the doctrine of foreknowledge in general, of which his view of counterfactuals is only a part.

not occur randomly or by chance. Chance does not rule over God. Something is *possible* because it is agreeable to God's character and He can bring it about. For example, it is impossible for God to turn himself into something that is not God. On the other hand, it was possible that Peter would not deny Christ (perhaps Thomas would have instead, or none of the disciples). But this was not determined on a toss of dice. Such possible things are not probabilistic things. Rather, a *possible* in this sense becomes *actual* when God decrees it to be. All things owe their possibility or actuality to the character and will of God, not to fate or random chance.

The CC view is therefore a soft-deterministic view. It does not go as far as hard determinism, but it does make clear that God knows things with certainty because of his decree, with no probabilities attached.¹²⁶ The CC view avoids the "possibility" problems with MK and CMK. Recall that one argument against MK was that it is unclear how something can be "possible" in God's NK yet not actualizable due to his MK. How then is it genuinely *possible*? Even worse, if a creaturely choice was a real possibility in the random/libertarian sense, then it was unclear how God could know it in advance of it happening. Tiessen realized that CMK suffers the same kind of problem, in that the *coulds* (the possibilities) are really no different than the *woulds*, and so the third type of knowledge collapses into the other two.

God Knows Counterfactuals

Before we can be confident in answering the question of *how* God knows

¹²⁶ *Soft determinism* is also called *non-constraining causation*, in which an event is rendered certain but not fatalistically necessary. Freedom and causation are compatible in the soft determinist view. *Hard determinism* means that there is no human free will and every event is causally determined by God, who freely chose how to actualize the world. *Fatalism* goes further and suggests that not even God had freedom to choose how to actualize the world.

counterfactuals, we need to be assured *that* he knows them in the first place. To this logically prior question, we can give an affirmative answer for two reasons. First, there are many counterfactual statements in the Bible that are presented as true and as thus are objects of God's knowledge. Second, it is logically feasible that God knows them because of a more specific version of the correspondence theory of truth. These reasons will be explained in the following paragraphs.

God can know counterfactuals, first of all, because the face value of many Bible passages indicates that he does. How he knows them is not as clear, but *that* he knows them is quite clear. All of the examples listed in chapter 2 could be marshaled here. For one, consider

1 Corinthians 2:8: [The wisdom of God] which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The counterfactual is "If X then Y," where X= "the rulers of this age understood the wisdom of God" and Y = "they would not have crucified the Lord." Even though X did not happen, the Bible asserts here that God knew the consequent to be true if the antecedent had been; this makes the whole counterfactual true. It may have been that God knew that the rulers had enough common sense not to kill the Son of God; it might be that God knew his own intervention in showing them the wisdom of God may have included his bringing them to salvation; or it may have been some other possibility. Regardless, it seems hard to deny the truth of 1 Corinthians 2:8 given a high view of Scripture including inspiration, and inerrancy. In this much, the CC view agrees with the MK and CMK views—that God does in fact possess counterfactual knowledge.

True counterfactuals are more than mere possibilities, so it is not enough to say that God knows them *as* possibilities. He knows them as the *woulds* of situations that

never in fact come to pass. They are more certain than mere possibilities.¹²⁷ To look at it from the opposite perspective, false counterfactuals are not possibilities at all. In decreeing the world that is, God gave true counterfactuals their truth and false counterfactuals their falsity. They exist no more in the realm of possibility. Another way to explain the notion of counterfactuals as more than possibilities is to examine the two component parts of the counterfactual. The antecedent X was genuinely a possibility (feasible for God) before the decree. The consequent Y was also a genuine possibility when considered separate from the antecedent. But after the decree, the antecedent became an impossibility since it would not come to pass. After the decree, God can no longer know the whole counterfactual statement as a possibility since its antecedent is impossible. So if he does not know it as a possibility, does he know it as an impossibility? In a sense, yes, because it will never come to pass. But in another sense, it can also be described as a true counterfactual (a true impossibility). Had he decided to decree the antecedent, he is telling us he also would have decided to decree the consequent. With the subjunctive in the antecedent, we understand the full form of the counterfactual is this: “if [God had decreed] X [(though he did not)], then [God would have decreed] Y.” This is a true statement—that is what God would have done. It will not come to pass, but it is true.

The second support for the feasibility of God knowing counterfactuals is that the counterfactual corresponds to a reality in God. A serious objection to the notion that God

¹²⁷ Consider Mark 14:21: “It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” This is not just a possibility, but a reality. That is to say, this statement says more than “it was possible for it to be better for him, but it was also possible for it to be worse.” Rather, it was only possible for it to be better—that is the fact being stated. Note the counterfactual form: “If he had not been born, it would have been better for him.”

can know counterfactuals is that counterfactuals must be false because they do not correspond to something that actually comes to pass.¹²⁸ This objection to counterfactuals relies on a particular understanding of truth, the correspondence view of truth, which basically says that truth is what corresponds to reality.¹²⁹ Since the counterfactual never becomes reality, the question arises as to how it can be true.

In addition to the Bible passages that appear to show God knows counterfactuals as true, it seems reasonable to believe that they are true based on a more particular version of the correspondence theory of truth. All that is necessary for a counterfactual to be true is that it corresponds to how God understands things, not necessarily that they come to pass. Just because something does not come to pass does not mean that it is not true. All that is required for a counterfactual to be true is that the consequent *would* have followed had the antecedent come to pass. This view of truth is not divorced from reality, because it finds some of its basis in the way God decreed things to be (the character of the person making the decision, the non-variable circumstances, etc.). It finds the remainder of its basis in how God would have decreed differently had he decreed the antecedent to come to pass. This could have included changes in the creaturely decision, changes in the circumstances, and changes in God's activity that surrounded that

¹²⁸ To say that some counterfactuals are true is a non-trivial assertion. The assertion could be denied on at least two bases. The first we deal with above, namely, the objection that counterfactuals cannot be true because they are statements about things that never come to pass. The second objection comes from the libertarian non-MK advocate, that counterfactuals cannot be true because they make a statement about what a free creature definitely *would* do, when the whole counterfactual setup assumes the creature could choose between various real possibilities. Since the creature could choose A, B, or C, to say that he *would definitely* choose B is false, because he really could choose the others. This argument, that all counterfactuals are unquestionably false, is made in William Hasker, "Reply to Basinger on Power Entailment," *FP 5* (January 1988): 87–90. Hasker's objection does not apply to my compatibilist view, since I do not admit that there are multiple genuine "possibilities" in the sense he uses the term.

¹²⁹ For an introduction to various theories of truth, see Normal L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 235–51.

decision.¹³⁰ In the end, all truth, even counterfactual truth, finds its ground of truth in God and not in the creation *per se*.

God Knows Counterfactuals without MK or CMK

At this point, it may be objected that if God knows counterfactuals as truths, then he must have middle knowledge, and the CC view is no different than MK. But this objection is based on a conflation of two distinct ideas. Counterfactual knowledge is one thing, and *how* God knows counterfactuals, whether by MK or some other mechanism, is another thing. We can say that God knows counterfactuals without accepting MK and all of the baggage that comes with it, and that is precisely what the CC explanation attempts to do.¹³¹ And, we ought to say so, because we have seen that God does know counterfactuals, and we have seen insuperable problems with both the MK and CMK accounts of how God knows them. There must be a better explanation.

God Knows Counterfactuals in His Natural and in His Free Knowledge

One of the primary objections to MK and CMK is that the objects of middle knowledge seem to be known by God in either his necessary knowledge or his free knowledge. Turretin supports this notion that God's necessary and free knowledge together encompass all knowable things.¹³² Therefore, an important step to understanding

¹³⁰ Both Craig and Campbell support the notion that there are true counterfactuals that do not come to pass. See Craig, "Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the 'Grounding Objection,'" pp. 338–39 and Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," pp. 10–11.

¹³¹ That MK baggage includes that God has a third type of knowledge, that he knows the decisions libertarianly free creatures would make in every possible situation, that he has no power over those decisions, that he uses this knowledge in his creation of the universe, and that we cannot be certain that we have a ground for the truth of such counterfactuals.

¹³² Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:214. What God knows by middle knowledge actually belongs in one of the other two categories.

how God knows counterfactuals is to determine whether such knowledge should be placed in his natural or in his free knowledge. But it is at this very point where the literature shows either debate or confusion. Recall from chapter 3 that Laing places God's counterfactual knowledge in his free knowledge. Frame places counterfactual knowledge in God's natural knowledge.

But, the point is also confused or at least not clearly stated, as can be demonstrated from a couple of sources. Campbell writes, "On the contrary, counterfactuals of creaturely freedom *are* known *only* posterior to the divine decree."¹³³ This would require that such knowledge is placed in God's *free knowledge*. Later in the same paper, he writes, "Therefore, Contrary to Molina, Tiessen, and Ware, middle knowledge reduces to *natural* and, hence, is simply not needed for a robust doctrine of providence."¹³⁴ So which is it? Should counterfactuals be placed in God's natural knowledge or his free knowledge?

A similar confusion is on display in Gottfried Leibniz as quoted and interpreted by Robert Sleight. Note Sleight's comment: "[Leibniz] can account for God's knowledge of [the Keilah counterfactual] without appeal to anything other than what is required in order to account for any item of God's knowledge of simple intelligence."¹³⁵ Simple intelligence refers to God's natural or necessary knowledge, also known as his *scientia simplicis intelligentiae*. However, two pages later, Sleight writes, "The clear implication of Leibniz's reconstruction seems to be that God's knowledge of contingent counterfactual conditionals about actual individuals — including contingent

¹³³ Campbell, "Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique," p. 15.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21, emphasis added.

¹³⁵ Robert Sleight, "Leibniz on Divine Foreknowledge," *FP* 11 (October 1994): 562.

counterfactual conditionals of freedom — is post-volitional.”¹³⁶ This would make counterfactual knowledge part of God’s free knowledge, or *scientia visionis*.¹³⁷

This confusion is not without reason. It comes about because the definition of “counterfactual” that is used is not consistent. Recall from the first chapter that the term can be used in several related but different senses. Disambiguating these senses is a key to properly understanding the question posed in this thesis. Sleigh’s first use of counterfactual really refers to possibilities before the decree; the second use of counterfactual refers to actualities after the decree.

Before proceeding further, I propose the following notation to clarify the distinction between the different uses of the term *counterfactual*. With respect to conditional subjunctives of the form [CF] if X then Y, there are three ways that the term *counterfactual* may be used:

CF-NK = counterfactuals in God’s natural knowledge. These subjunctive conditionals encompass all possibilities. Logically speaking, before the decree they are all equally plausible but none are true or false per se. They are only *possibilities*, in the sense that they are consistent with God’s nature, and God could choose to instantiate some of them by his decree.¹³⁸

CF-FK = counterfactuals in God’s free knowledge. These subjunctive

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 564–65.

¹³⁷ Note that when this term is used, it refers to God’s knowledge of the actual world as he has decreed it to be. It does not imply that God obtains this knowledge by prescience or “vision” of the future.

¹³⁸ Guleserian calls the subset of these CF-NK conditionals that have to do with the choices of creatures *subjunctive conditionals of freedom*. Theodore Guleserian, “Ontological Determination and the Grounding Objection To Counterfactuals of Freedom,” *FP* 25 (October 2008): 395.

conditionals are the conditionals which God decreed would have a false antecedent. Even though they have a false antecedent, they may be true or false as a whole statement. God knows the truth or falsity of them as part of his free knowledge. The conditionals that are true as a whole statement belong to what I called in chapter 1 the restricted definition of *counterfactual*.¹³⁹

CF-HK = counterfactuals in human knowledge. These are subjunctive conditionals which appear equally plausible from the human perspective but which may in the end turn out to be either facts (conditionals with a true antecedent and true consequent) or true counterfactuals or false counterfactuals. Because humans cannot know the future, even false counterfactuals may seem to be “equally possible” or they may even seem to be true when in fact God knows them to be false.

So, CF-FK is a subset of CF-NK. Out of the conditionals in CF-NK, God decreed certain circumstances to come to pass. The conditionals whose antecedents and consequents would come to pass become the *facts*. The conditionals whose antecedents will not come to pass but whose consequents *would be* true had the antecedent been true become the *true counterfactuals*. This is so because God knew and decided that he would see to it that the consequent would come to pass had he also decreed the antecedent to come to pass. Finally, the remaining conditionals are *false counterfactuals*. These false

¹³⁹ Guleserian calls the subset of these CF-FK conditionals that have to do with the free choices of creatures *genuine counterfactuals of freedom*. See *ibid.*, p. 395.

counterfactuals have the property that “if X then Y” is not true as a whole statement, either because the outcome is opposite of the true counterfactual (and is thus false), or because the circumstances just never come to pass.

This can be illustrated from our example of 1 Samuel 23 in chapter 1:

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| [1] if David stays in Keilah, Saul will capture him | = true counterfactual |
| [2] if David leaves Keilah, Saul will capture him | = false counterfactual |
| [3] if David stays in Keilah, Saul will not capture him | = false counterfactual |
| [4] if David leaves Keilah, Saul will not capture him | = fact |

We should note that the revelation given to David in 1 Samuel 23 only includes the counterfactual [1]. By knowing that, he knows that [3] is false as well. But the text does not tell us that he has certainty about [2] or [4]. From God’s perspective, and in our hindsight we see that [2] was false and [4] was fact. But from David’s perspective with his CF-HK at the time of his departure, he probably still wondered if Saul will capture him out in the wilderness at some point. In other words, [2] and [4] probably seemed equally likely as counterfactuals. Such CF-HK counterfactuals are a subset of God’s CF-NK. Divine revelation served to narrow down the field of counterfactuals that David had to worry about, but it did not make CF-HK equal to CF-FK, at least at the time of the crisis.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ Another interesting question is this: how do humans know counterfactuals? In David’s case, before God’s revelation, he did not know the outcome, so he “knew” the counterfactuals as possibilities that had some probabilities. Perhaps he felt it more likely that he would evade capture because of God’s earlier promise of the throne. But maybe the path to the throne was through capture? He then received the advantage of divine revelation to know a couple of the cases with certainty. The others remained as possibilities. But given that he knew Saul’s hatred for him, Saul’s character, the nature of his threat to Saul’s power, and so forth, he would know that the chase was still on. In some cases, our knowledge of the circumstances will make our knowledge of the counterfactual outcome more or less certain. For instance, if I pondered jumping out of my office window, I would (normally) expect to be severely injured due to the effects of the natural law of gravity. But, without prior knowledge, I would be unable to guarantee that

Based upon this taxonomy, what Campbell should have clarified is that:

[1] Counterfactuals of compatibilist creaturely freedom are known only posterior to the divine decree, and thus are part of God's *free knowledge*. These are CF-FKs.

[2] Statements with a counterfactual form (whether actual or not actual) are known in God's *natural knowledge* as part of his knowledge of all possibilities, as CF-NKs.

So does God know counterfactuals in his natural or his free knowledge? The answer is yes to both, depending on the definition of counterfactual being utilized! Since this thesis is concerned about how God knows counterfactuals (and not how humans know them), the task reduces to two simpler questions. First, how does God know counterfactuals of the CF-NK type? And second, how does God know CF-FK counterfactuals? We will examine these questions in turn in the next sections.

God Knows CF-NK Counterfactuals as Feasible

The answer to the first question is rather straightforward. God knows CF-NK counterfactuals as things that are feasible for him to instantiate in a created world because they agree with his nature. How God knows these CF-NK counterfactuals is simply that he knows himself. This is an immediate, intuitive, non-discursive, and non-deliberative knowledge which encompasses everything that God is and could decide to do.¹⁴¹ As such, CF-NK-type counterfactuals are no different than any other object of God's natural knowledge. They can be considered "possibilities" if that word is divorced from its

outcome because it may be the case that four feet of snow fell overnight which would cushion my fall!

¹⁴¹ Discursive refers to the process of moving to a conclusion by reason or argument rather than intuition.

“random” or “pure chance” connotation.

God Knows CF-FK Counterfactuals Because He Knows His Will and Himself

The explanation of how God knows CF-FK counterfactuals is more involved. We must now consider the more strict definition of a counterfactual, that is, a subjunctive conditional whose antecedent has been decreed to be false. Such CF-FKs follow the decree and thus must belong to God’s free knowledge since there are only two logical types of knowledge in God, and the *counterfactual* is beyond the “possibility stage” because it implies a corresponding *fact* that has been decreed. But it is even more complicated than that.

The example of Matthew 11:20–24 will help to explain the complexity. The relevant counterfactual is this: “If these miracles had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented.” The miracles were not done there, so this is definitely counter to the facts.

In literature on the subject of counterfactuals, most from the middle knowledge perspective, the approach is to label this counterfactual as a counterfactual of creaturely freedom, and to look at it in that light. That is, the counterfactual is assumed to be of the form “If agent S were in circumstances C, then he would freely choose A,” where agent S = residents of Tyre and Sidon; C = Christ’s miracles were done then and there; and A = to repent. The focus is on the residents of Tyre and Sidon and their response to the miracles. In a sense it is as if they operate in a vacuum with various circumstances presented to them, and they choose one way or the other. God simply happens to know, in the MK and CMK views, how they will respond.

But there is far more going on “behind the scenes” than that. God is an actor as

well. God has made some decisions about what to do with the residents of Tyre and Sidon, and how to do it. MK advocates may object at this point that God's action is included in "circumstances C." In response, it should be noted that the counterfactual should not only focus on creaturely freedom, but it should also take into account Divine freedom. And it must do so in *both* antecedent and consequent. Actually, God's freedom should be emphasized even more than man's in every case because God is the initiator and originator of all things. God decides whether or not to do special miracles in Tyre and Sidon. God decides how he will work through his grace to achieve the desired response.

The counterfactual's consequent (the desired response) is not entirely specified, because the nature of the repentance is not fully specified. The repentance could be of a common-grace sort in which the residents of Tyre and Sidon would have expressed genuine sorrow over their bad behavior and amend their ways, but where such sorrow would not be integrated with a faith-response toward God which accompanies salvation. On the other hand, the repentance could have been unto salvation, associated as it would need to be, with faith in the God who produced the miracles. A similar interpretive difficulty attends the interpretation of Jonah's Ninevites, who repented in sackcloth at the announcement of impending doom (Jonah 3:5–10). Was this a salvific repentance or not? Interpreters do not agree at this point. With the later judgment proclaimed against Nineveh just a few generations later (by the prophet Nahum), it does not seem likely that there was a true mass conversion at Jonah's preaching.

In either case, an action of God had to be done to make the counterfactual true. In the "human repentance" case, God would have had to decree to send a messenger and

enable him to work miracles and (presumably) call the residents of Tyre and Sidon to repentance. In the “salvific repentance” case, God had to act to send the messenger (as above), *and also* act to draw those residents to himself and enlighten them and give them the gift of salvation.¹⁴² Perhaps if they had exercised human repentance, God would have decreed to follow up later with an efficacious work of grace to save them. Regardless, we do not have to commit to either explanation (human or salvific repentance) to understand that the counterfactual cannot leave God out of the equation—i.e., it is not a counterfactual of creaturely freedom alone. All counterfactuals involve God, because they would involve a change in his decree to make the antecedent true, and they would involve other changes in his decree with respect to bringing about the consequent. It is particularly important to include divine intervention in bringing about the consequent when it involves salvation—an event which requires God’s life-giving work on the agent.

Given the significant place of God in the counterfactual truth, the next step is to consider how the counterfactual relates to God’s knowledge of his decree and of himself. He knows based on his knowledge of his decree that Tyre and Sidon did not have the benefit of the miracles, and that they did not in fact repent. But if we take as a given the truth of the counterfactual, Jesus is saying in Matthew 11, “if it had been God’s decree to send the miracles to Tyre and Sidon, then God would also have decreed that they would have repented.” This implies that God knows his decree *and* he knows how slight changes in his decree would result in other changes to the decree.

It seems best to explain that God knows the counterfactual on a two-fold basis:

1. He knows the counterfactual, in part, based on his decree. He knows how he

¹⁴² It should be evident that I do not believe in a universal prevenient grace given to all people.

decreed the residents of Tyre and Sidon to be as people; he knows all the circumstances surrounding their lives, etc. The counterfactual residents of Tyre and Sidon are presented to be identical in every respect to the historical residents of Tyre and Sidon, except that they had the benefit of miracles to help them change their minds. So, God's actual decree is relevant in determining how they would react in slightly different circumstances.

2. God also knows the counterfactual, in part, based on his knowledge of himself. That is to say, he knows that if he changed his decree in the way specified in the antecedent of the counterfactual, then it would be his inclination to change his decree in the way specified in the consequent of the counterfactual. This implies he knows the possibilities for how he will act to bring about all the possible consequents, and he knows how he would be inclined to choose among those possibilities. His inclinations arise from all his other attributes, such as his justice, love, holiness, etc.

In this way, we cannot strictly say that God knows CF-FK counterfactuals as part of his free knowledge only, for counterfactuals add the complexity that God knows how he would change his decree (how his FK could have been different). He must know the feasible ways to modify the consequent, from his NK, and which way he would choose to take. The counterfactual is telling us what way he would certainly choose in the hypothetical case. For all practical purposes, then, CF-FK is an appropriate name for these counterfactuals, because *the truth of the counterfactual rests on how God decided he would change the consequent given a different antecedent*. Thus the CC view places God's knowledge of counterfactuals in his free knowledge and as logically following his decree.

This sounds like a hybrid natural+free knowledge explanation for how God

knows counterfactuals. In a sense, that is true. But in another sense, it is not. God consults his natural knowledge in the formulation of his decree. But we do not see this as “mixing” his natural and free knowledge together into a third type of knowledge. Similarly, for him to consult his natural knowledge in the formulation of how he would vary his decree for a counterfactual seems to be a substantially similar use of his natural knowledge that does not result in a third type of knowledge. It simply results in additional subject matter known by God in his free knowledge. Therefore, the CC explanation is a free knowledge explanation of how God knows counterfactuals.

What has been described may sound like a deliberative process—or worse, like an iterative-deliberative process where God bounces back and forth between his decree/free knowledge and his natural knowledge. Theologically, it is highly problematic to allow a deliberative process in which God arrives at knowledge that he did not previously have. Rather, his omniscience encompasses all things simultaneously. In the tradition of those who write on this subject, I espouse a “logical” view of God’s knowledge. The iteration can be “flattened” by observing that in making the decree, God also decides how he will handle all necessary counterfactuals in one grand decision.

To return to the earlier argument about the correspondence theory of truth, the CC view explains why a counterfactual can be true at all (recall this is the question logically prior to the one asked by this thesis). The truth of the counterfactual is not found in its correspondence to reality, since it never comes to pass. Rather, its truth is found in its correspondence to the way that God would change his decree. It is as if God says, “OK, if you are going to demand of me how I would do things if this antecedent were true, I will tell you. I already decided that I would do or willingly permit *this* particular

consequent.”¹⁴³ The truth of the counterfactual is found in the reality of how God would modify his ways. Such things can be true even though they never come to pass, because they specify a truth about God and his decree and his nature.¹⁴⁴

In conclusion to this subsection, the CC view explains God’s knowledge of counterfactuals by using both his free and natural knowledge. The CC explanation emphasizes that God’s knowledge of counterfactuals (the more restricted variety) must logically follow his decree and is thus part of his free knowledge.

God Knows CF-FK Counterfactuals on a Compatibilist Basis

The CC view, as its name implies, espouses a compatibilist view of human freedom. This is helpful, because, as the CMK view clarified, God can know the free choices of creatures on a compatibilist basis. With libertarian free choice in stock MK, the outcome could not be known in advance, since there are no conditions that are sufficient to pin down what the decision will be in advance of it.

Compatibilist freedom is the view that the human’s will is free and yet at the same time caused.¹⁴⁵ That is to say, freedom and determinism are compatible.¹⁴⁶ In this thesis,

¹⁴³ This seems to imply an “all else equal” notion. That is, God is saying, “All else being equal, except this particular change of antecedent, this is the new consequent.”

¹⁴⁴ I am making use of a Van Til-style combination of consciously-theistic correspondence and coherence theories of truth. The correspondence is not to facts or states of affairs in themselves, but instead the correspondence is to the way God sees things. See Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, In Defense of Biblical Christianity series, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), pp. 1–2.

¹⁴⁵ See Baker, “Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians,” p. 468. Feinberg provides good explanations of compatibilism in “God Ordains All Things,” in *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger, pp. 19–43 and *No One Like Him*, pp. 635–39. Another defender of compatibilism is Paul Helm, *The Providence of God*, pp. 66–68.

¹⁴⁶ As such, compatibilism consists of more than the general thesis “human freedom and divine foreknowledge are *compatible*.” It offers a somewhat deeper explanation of *how* they are compatible and is associated with a non-libertarian view of freedom. Flint offers a defense of the general thesis from a libertarian perspective in “In Defence of Theological Compatibilism,” *FP* 8 (April 1991): 237–43. Kai

compatibilism is of the soft-determinist sort where the causation is due to past events, the laws of nature, the person's inclinations, and God's intervention.¹⁴⁷ The causal aspect of compatibilism is "non-constraining" in the sense that God renders the act of the will certain, but not fatalistically so, and in a way that maintains human responsibility.¹⁴⁸ Certainty is thus distanced from "forced necessity" so that the creature's freedom is not just an illusion. The human will is free, not in a libertarian or indifferent sense, but in the sense that the person has a voluntary freedom or freedom of inclination.

This CC view, coupled with the earlier assertion about God knowing counterfactuals by knowing his decree and knowing himself, effectively dispatches the grounding objection that is raised against MK views. The ground of the truths of counterfactuals is found in God's free knowledge, as influenced by his natural knowledge of how he would adjust his decree in various circumstances. He can know the choices of creatures in the actual world, and in similar but slightly different counterfactual worlds, because he knows all of the factors, including the inclinations of the creatures, that lead to the decisions they make.

Instead of accepting the complicated machinery of middle knowledge, it is far easier to postulate that God knows himself and also knows so well the character of

Nielsen defends the thesis, but from a compatibilist stance. See Nielsen, "The Compatibility of Freedom and Determinism" in *Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), pp. 39–46. It is very common among evangelicals to simply leave the two doctrines of freedom and foreknowledge/sovereignty in tension or "antinomy." For instance, see D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

¹⁴⁷ I have expanded on the definition offered by Fischer in "Compatibilism," in John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), p. 44. He only includes past events and natural laws, but this does not seem sufficient, given that God can intervene in miraculous ways, particularly today in regeneration.

¹⁴⁸ Stewart Goetz, "Libertarian Choice," *FP* 14 (April 1997): 195–211, develops a case for the opposing view, namely that free agents choose without causation, in order to maintain human responsibility.

morally responsible agents *as he has created them* that he knows what they would do in slightly different circumstances. Middle knowledge proponents do not, to this author's knowledge, demonstrate that this is not a viable explanation to the passages they cite in support of their view.¹⁴⁹ To say that someone would chose cookies over liver presupposes that we are talking about someone who has a known set of desires as created by God, and that the offer of liver or cookies will not in itself change those desires from what we observe in our world apart from such an offer. The truth of a counterfactual rests, in part, on how things (people) are by God's design.¹⁵⁰ The truth of it also rests on how God knows he would change his own decree and intervention if he were to make the offer of liver or cookies. Perhaps he would decide to change the person's nature so that he hated cookies and desired liver!

Comparison with Feinberg's Soft Determinist Middle Knowledge

Chapter 3 mentioned John Feinberg's mild CMK position (hereafter referred to as SDMK).¹⁵¹ His view was not used as a foil in that chapter because Tiessen and Ware

¹⁴⁹ See Craig, *Only Wise God*, p. 137, fn 1, where he admits the possibility of other explanations, but he believes that middle knowledge is so useful as to override this possibility.

¹⁵⁰ I am not suggesting that God decrees and then "back-figures" all counterfactuals on the basis of what came out of his decree. Craig would be unhappy with such a reverse engineering. In *Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, p. 176, he writes, "[God] does not, for example, first know what Peter will do in the actual circumstances that will exist and then on this basis know what Peter would have done had he been placed in some other set of circumstances. Rather, the opposite is true: prior to God's decision to create any set of circumstances, He knows what Peter would do within any possible order of circumstances; then, given the decision of His will to bring about a certain set of circumstances, God knows what Peter will in fact do." I would say that counterfactuals are brought relevance inasmuch as they are related to *facts* that God decreed to bring about. By instantiating the present world, God brings relevancy and truth to some counterfactuals and not others. Before that point, counterfactuals are only of the CF-NK sort and are neither true nor false. They become true or false after the decree. To even speak of Peter and what he would do presupposes that we have an idea of the decreed type of Peter that we are talking about. It is this Peter, with his nature, that we would be considering when asking what his response would be in this or that different circumstance.

¹⁵¹ See particularly Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, pp. 747–52. He also briefly addresses the issue in Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. David Basinger and Randall

were much more forceful proponents of the “coulds and woulds” version of MK.

Feinberg’s position is more soft determinist and less MK-like than Ware and Tiessen.

This puts it very close to the compatibilist counterfactual explanation offered in this chapter, so it is easy to wonder if the two views differ in any significant ways.

Our views are admittedly quite similar. For instance, Feinberg’s SDMK rejects libertarian freedom because it does not offer a clear way for God to know certainly what a creature *would* do.¹⁵² He also believes that counterfactuals can indeed be true, and God can know them on a compatibilist basis, at least on the basis of the antecedents that he sees in other possible worlds. Both views share a soft-determinist framework.

However, there are some differences. First, Feinberg retains the MK terminology which I jettison entirely to avoid all of its Catholic and Arminian undercurrents, among other reasons. There is no need for the term, even in Feinberg’s system, because (1) his definition of MK seems to be just that middle knowledge is the knowledge of counterfactuals, which does not require middle knowledge terminology; and (2) his SDMK is post-volitional, not pre-volitional, which discards the second major premise of MK (libertarian freedom being the other major premise). The CC explanation offered here avoids the historical baggage of MK by calling the explanation more clearly what it is: a compatibilist counterfactual explanation. It is not a third type of knowledge in God.

Second and more significant is that the CC explanation offers a more in-depth analysis of various types of counterfactuals (CF-NK, CF-FK, and CF-HK) and *how* God knows them. The subject matter of God’s free knowledge includes both what *will* occur

Basinger, pp. 33–34.

¹⁵² Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, p. 751.

and what *would* occur in different circumstances, and both of these are influenced by God's natural knowledge. In this, CC is an advance over SDMK because Feinberg does not explain this interplay between natural and free in the formulation of the decree with regard to things that will be, and with regard to counterfactuals.

Third, the CC view says that God's knowledge of counterfactuals is not *middle* of his natural and free knowledge. If anything, it would be logically or explanatorily *after* his "regular" free knowledge since it presumes the way things will be has been settled by the decree, thus giving relevance to various counterfactual situations. Feinberg does not seem to explain how SDMK can be *middle* or even how it differs from free knowledge even though both come after the decree. Perhaps it is middle in his view just because it has a different sort of content.

Fourth, CC clearly distinguishes God's knowledge of counterfactuals from his knowledge of possibilities. Feinberg seems to say the opposite when he writes,

Middle knowledge (as knowledge of counterfactuals) is knowledge of possibilities, not actualities. Since middle knowledge is a knowledge of what *might* occur, it is irrelevant to the question of how God can know what *will* happen in the future. Moreover, middle knowledge does not entail that God knows what *could* happen if something else occurred, but rather what *would* happen if something else occurred.¹⁵³

This is somewhat unclear as to the interplay of "might" and "could" and "would." But it is clear that he treats counterfactuals as possibilities. The CC view is more defined because it says that God does not know counterfactuals as possibilities. Possibilities are reserved for God's natural knowledge before the decree. Counterfactuals are actually impossibilities because they will never come to pass. However, God knows true counterfactuals as "true impossibilities" because the counterfactual specifies the truth of

¹⁵³ Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things," in *Predestination & Free Will*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger, p. 34.

what God would have done if he had decreed other circumstances to come to pass. False counterfactuals are those counterfactuals that will not or would not have come to pass. God knows them as “false impossibilities.” That sounds strange, but all it means is that God knows the event is not going to happen, and even *if* circumstances had changed somewhat, it *still* would not have happened because God would not have wanted it to.

The bottom line is that the CC view has some notable differences with the SDMK view, even though they also have substantial similarities.

How Many True Counterfactuals Does God Know?

There is much more that could be said. For instance, is there really an infinite number of possible worlds with people who did not exist in any similar form in the actual world? Are there an even more infinite number of counterfactuals associated with these possible worlds and the people in them who never existed? Is such information useless or does it clutter God’s mind? There seem to be four possible answers to this question of “how many counterfactuals God knows.” The first answer has been considered and rejected, i.e. that God does not know any counterfactuals. The biblical case seems too clear that he indeed does know at least some counterfactuals.

The second answer is the most expansive, and is held by the MK view. In MK, God knows all possible worlds and counterfactuals, even those that were not actualizable. This is an apparently infinite number of infinities of possibilities (call this P1). This set of possibilities is whittled down by the creatures’ free will to those worlds that can become actual (call this P2, which is much smaller than P1, though still infinite). Then God selects from P2 the world he desires to actualize. Recall it was at this point that an objection to MK was raised in chapter 2, namely how can God know all things in P1 as

possible if only the things in the subset P2 are “really possible”? P1 seems to contain so many things that are truly useless (they could never become possible) that it does seem like clutter in God’s knowledge.

A third answer to the question of how many counterfactuals God knows is at the other end of the spectrum, namely that God knows only those counterfactuals that are revealed in the Bible. This is a conservative answer, but it does not seem feasible in the face of texts like Deuteronomy 29:29 (“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons”). God *has* revealed some things to us, including true counterfactuals. But God has not revealed everything that he knows, and it seems reasonable to assume that some true counterfactuals are among those things that he has not revealed to us. According to the explanation of CF-FKs offered in this paper, true CF-FKs are simply statements about how God would have changed his decree if he had made certain other small changes in it. It seems unreasonable to say that every possible change to God’s decree and the associated counterfactuals are disclosed in the Bible.

The correct answer (the fourth) seems to lie somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum. God knows more counterfactuals than just the revealed ones, but he knows less than the P1 possibilities of MK, because those things could never have become actual anyway. They are not objects of knowledge. CF-FK puts a severe limit on the number of relevant counterfactuals because counterfactuals have a corresponding fact, and that fact is tied to the existent world through God’s decree. A person who never exists in any similar form in the world does not have a fact in the present world on which to even formulate a counterfactual in CF-FK. Of course we can imagine the existence of

such a person, and God can too (in CF-NK). But it hardly seems relevant because God never decreed the person to exist, and it does not appear to be a necessary factor in our study of God's revelation in the Bible. The CC view suggests that God has an expansive counterfactual knowledge because he knows exhaustively what he would prefer to do in any case were he to change his decree in some way. Therefore, the number of counterfactuals in the CC view is *far smaller* than the P1 amount of knowledge from the MK view. On the other hand, the number of counterfactuals in the CC view is *more* than the "biblical revelation" amount from the third answer. It is even different than the P2 amount of knowledge, because P2 consists of possibilities. Those are objects of God's NK and CF-NK. God's CF-FK is a subset of CF-NK which makes it smaller still. That is still a lot of knowledge to be carrying around, but is no problem for a God with an infinite intellect.

One objection to this fourth answer is that it still seems God has a lot of useless knowledge. It may seem useless from our vantage point since it is not "relevant" or ever put into practice. I would offer two responses. First, by nature God knows everything that is, and he knows himself and how he could and would have done things differently in every possible case. This does make for a lot of possibilities, but that is simply the nature of omniscience. A lot of knowledge will be "extra" in some sense because it is not actualized. And secondly, God did use all of his knowledge in the establishment of his decree (logically speaking, God consulted his natural knowledge in the formulation of his decree to make the grand decision about how he would prefer things to be). Much of his knowledge of possibilities (including CF-NK) was not "useless" then even if it seems so now.

Conclusion

This chapter presented a Calvinist, compatibilist, two-knowledge explanation of how God knows counterfactuals. It is able to avoid some of the problems of the MK and CMK views presented in the previous chapters because it does not rely on libertarian freedom, nor does it rely on a pre-volitional, third type of knowledge in God different from his natural and free knowledge. The chapter explained that God does know true counterfactuals as truths despite the fact that they never come to pass; their ground is found in his decree and how he decided he would change that decree in slightly different hypothetical situations. The principal claim made in the chapter is that the definition of terms is the key to properly understanding how God knows counterfactuals. If by the term *counterfactual* is meant all statements, before the decree, of the form “if X, then Y,” it is the case that God knows such statements together with his knowledge of all things feasible for him to create in his natural knowledge. These are the CF-NKs. If by the term is meant all such statements that actually end up having false antecedents, then God knows these as part of his free knowledge. These are the CF-FKs. Several biblical examples of counterfactuals were explained with this framework.

What remains is to provide some explanation of how the compatibilist counterfactual explanation affects other areas of theology and what practical implications it has for Christians. These issues will be briefly addressed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND SUMMARY

After all the technical philosophical and theological matters regarding counterfactuals are laid out, the inevitable question arises: What difference does all this make? Why is it important how God knows counterfactuals? Does this affect the average Christian in some important way? The answer to this question comes in two parts, which will be addressed in turn in the following sections.

Theological Implications

One important theological implication of the CC view is related to the doctrine of man's depravity. Sin has wrecked not only mankind in general, but also each individual human's will, morality, personality, intellect, and all of his capacities. This ruin results in the complete inability of mankind, without the help of God, to please God (Rom 8:8). Depravity is most visible in the realm of "spiritual things." It may be manifested to lesser degrees in other departments of a person's life (e.g., his understanding of basic mathematics), but it nonetheless affects the whole of his existence, including his decision-making. This rebuts the libertarian view of freedom and undercuts the MK view immediately. Sin is a severe limiter on man's "free will" as popularly described. To understand that God knows counterfactuals apart from pure freedom of indifference is important because it has an important connection to the doctrines of anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology.

A second implication of the CC view expounded in chapter 4 is that it does not leave room for extended application of counterfactuals to a seemingly infinite number of non-realized worlds. Nor does it need to explain how God formulated his decree with a third type of knowledge that is in some sense based outside of himself. In short, a simpler explanation can be made for the counterfactuals that are presented as truths in the Bible, without appealing to an elaborate scheme that expands their role to a seemingly ubiquitous place in theology, as in William Lane Craig's writings. Obviously the explanation adopted in this thesis touches on a lot of areas of theology, but it does not rely on counterfactuals to explain everything.

For example, consider the imputation of Adam's sin mentioned as an application of MK in chapter 1. It is sufficient to explain that God constituted Adam as the federal head of the human race and decided that Adam's sin would be accounted to the whole race. The decision to have things to be this way is thus attributed directly to God without having God examine the intentions of every creature he could have created as to how it would have responded in the same circumstances that Adam faced. In any case, the MK advocate would acknowledge that it was God's decree that set things the way they are. Any mystery that remains should be considered as part of God's internal counsel. Any charge of unfairness should be dismissed as Paul does in Romans 9:19–24.

As another example, recall the application of MK to the salvation of infants. MK proposes that God judges an infant who dies on the basis of what the infant would have done later in life. But this approach leaves out a key party to the salvation transaction, namely God. The counterfactual is "if baby X had lived, he would have freely accepted Christ." The MK view proposes to leave God out of the consequent by making the choice

totally up to X in his future adult years. But according to the CC view, the counterfactual should be written this way: “if [God had decreed] baby X to live, then [God also would have drawn/convicted/effectually called] him to accept Christ.” There is no biblical text that suggests such a counterfactual is true in any particular case, nor in all cases of babies dying in infancy. Since the fact is that the baby dying in infancy did not exercise conscious faith, it is more sensible to use a traditional explanation—either God regenerates all such infants, or none, or just the elect ones. This answer may be less than satisfying, since it pushes the question back to the underlying question of election, but again, this makes explicit that the decision was fully God’s since the baby was unable at any time to make a decision.

Similar explanations can be offered for all the areas of theology that are allegedly neatly handled in the MK view.

A final implication is that the CC view, of course, rises or falls with the underlying doctrine of soft determinism or compatibilist freedom. A full case for that doctrine is outside of the scope of this thesis.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Objections to the doctrine of compatibilist freedom come from at least two directions. First, those who are hard determinists object that soft determinism evades the underlying question of where desires and character and the past come from in the first place. If they come from God, then it seems that soft determinism is too weak an explanation. For this objection, see Paul Edwards, “Hard and Soft Determinism,” in *Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane, pp. 59–67. Second, those who believe in unqualified human freedom object to soft determinism on the basis of the consequence argument. This argument states that if determinism is true, and the past and laws of nature are fixed, then our acts, which are consequences of these things, are not up to us. Therefore free will in a deterministic system is illusory. On this argument, see Peter van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,” pp. 71–82 of *Free Will*; William Hasker, *Metaphysics: Constructing a WorldView*, *Contours of Christian Philosophy*, ed. C. Stephen Evans (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), pp. 33–37; and John Martin Fischer, “Compatibilism,” in *Four Views on Free Will* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), pp. 53–56. Kenneth J. Perszyk doubts whether Molinists can logically use the consequence argument against compatibilists. See his “Molinism and the Consequence Argument: A Challenge,” *FP* 20 (April 2003): 131–51. There is another argument against determinism’s brand of freedom called the principle of alternative possibilities. On this, see Ishtiyaque Haji, “Compatibilist Views of Freedom and Responsibility,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 202–228.

Practical and Pastoral Implications

The most important practical or pastoral concern with respect to MK and counterfactuals has to do with God’s guidance in making decisions, particularly “big ones” such as college, choice of a spouse, changes in job or ministry, etc. How can we know the right path? To illustrate, consider an unmarried fellow named John who is dating a girl named Jane. He is unsure whether to ask her to marry him. But he knows in his CF-HK that each of the following (among probably others) are possibilities:

- [1] if I marry Jane, we will live happily ever after
- [2] if I marry Jane, we will have a rocky marriage
- [3] if I marry Jane, we will be divorced
- [4] if I don’t marry Jane, I will never be married and be unhappy my whole life
- [5] if I don’t marry Jane, I will end up in another rocky marriage
- [6] if I don’t marry Jane, I will end up divorced

The probability to assign to each counterfactual is unknown to John, but he supposes that God knows, so he prays and asks God. Like David in Keilah, he would hope to have the answer laid out clearly. At least it would be helpful to have some of the possibilities eliminated by God revealing whether they are true or false counterfactuals. If he knew [1] was the fact and [4] was a true counterfactual, it would be pretty clear what he should decide.

If we examine the situation from the perspective offered in this thesis, we will notice a couple of things. First, John has CF-HK. All of [1] through [6] seem like genuine possibilities. God knows better in his CF-FK, but he also knows what John will decide. This factors into which of these counterfactuals are even relevant. Second, even if God regularly did reveal his CF-FK in such circumstances, it would not at all be necessary to

assume that God has MK in order to help John with his decision. Remember, the question of whether God knows counterfactuals is a separate matter from *how* he does it. The CC explanation shows that God does know counterfactuals, and it explains the *how* in a much different manner than the MK explanation. In fact, God knows the character of Jane and his own future actions with respect to John and Jane. God knows whether she will be a committed wife, or whether she harbors the notion that if she doesn't end up liking John, she can always bail out by divorce. And he knows his own future actions that may sanctify Jane and John in their relationship.

A third and important point is that God does not promise to reveal to us the future. We do not have the benefit of special revelation as David did. He was specially protected by God because of his future place on the throne of Israel and the whole Davidic covenant program. We do not have such promises, and therefore, such protection by God. That is to say, God does not promise to refine our CF-HK so that it matches more closely his CF-FK. We must use the information that is available to us. We can certainly pray to ask God for wisdom (skill in applying the Scripture and using the information available to us), but we cannot expect him to reveal the future. In the end, God's perfect knowledge of everything, including his knowledge of counterfactuals, is not available to us in advance (Deut 29:29).

Summary

This thesis proposed to answer the question "How does God know counterfactuals?" It began by defining the term *counterfactual* and then it examined three possible answers to the question.

The middle knowledge explanation presumes libertarian freedom and relies on a

third type of knowledge between God's natural and free knowledge to explain how he knows the free choices of creatures. Besides problems with these two foundational points, we saw that MK had a number of other problems that make it infeasible as an answer to the question of how God knows counterfactuals.

The Calvinistic variation of MK fared a little better since it eliminates the libertarian freedom of stock MK. However, it suffers problems similar to the MK view, particularly the grounding objection and the question of the stability and internal consistency of the view. With the recent defection of Tiessen from the CMK camp, it seems that these concerns are well founded.

A fully Calvinist, compatibilist, and two-knowledge view of God's knowledge of counterfactuals was then explained. This is not a totally new explanation, to be sure. But besides dealing with some of the shortcomings of the other two views, it offers an important contribution in terms of clarifying that there are multiple types of counterfactuals, depending on the perspective from which we look at them (as statements before the decree, as counterfactuals strictly-defined after the decree, or as statements from the human perspective). The sense in which the term is used is a key in determining how God knows the particular type of counterfactual. God knows the "possibility-type" of counterfactuals in his natural knowledge, but these do not have any inherent truth until after his decree. God knows counterfactuals strictly-defined after his decree in his free knowledge because it is the decree that gives certain antecedents and consequents truth. True counterfactuals are those whose antecedents will not come to pass, but whose consequents would have, had the antecedents come to pass. Though there is debate whether counterfactuals can be true if they do not match reality, I defended their truth on

the basis that God knows his decree and how he would have changed it had he decreed other antecedents to come to pass. In effect, God's decree encompasses all that comes to pass, and all that he would have done in other, relevant circumstances. The truth of counterfactuals is grounded precisely there in God's decree. The CC explanation does not rely heavily on counterfactual knowledge to explain a number of issues such as the salvation of infants and God's guidance. But it does offer coherent explanations of these and other problems without the difficulties that attend the middle knowledge explanation and its variant Calvinistic middle knowledge.

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